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THE MARRIAGE TIE.

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THE MARRIAGE TIE.

From the German of

JOHANNES VON DEWALL.

BY

K. E. STANTIAL.

'As gold is tried by the fire
So the heart must be tried by pain.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL I.

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PREFACE.

THAT English people may learn what miseries the Law of Divorce brings, let them read this story from the German.

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

CHAPTER I.

W—— OUT OF SEASON.

'Sweet smiling village. . . .
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms
withdrawn.'

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

CHAPTER I.

W—— OUT OF SEASON.

I AM about to relate an incident in my own life.

In the year 185–, I found myself in W—— (I intentionally conceal the name of this little Electoral residence). I was ill at the time, and, by the advice of my doctor, had gone there for the benefit of the medicinal springs; afterwards, other and more tender cords riveted me to the little

place, where I remained until the winter was far advanced.

When I arrived at W——, in the middle of September, the season was just at its height. It was unusually beautiful for the time of year, and the place was thronged with strangers, attracted by the baths, the beauty of the scenery, and, more than all, by the gaming-tables.

W—— lies on the great tourist route to Switzerland; it is one of the chief stations between North Germany, Holland, England, and South Germany, and scarcely any one goes by without stopping there. This charming spot, with its lovely surroundings, possesses something of the alluring charm of a siren, who dwells among the vineyards and chestnut groves, and entices the wanderer to his doom.

The jingle of gold is the music which draws so many mortals to their ruin, and shipwrecks them miserably. Nor are fair forms and sparkling eyes wanting to complete the attraction of the scene. Now, indeed . . . Ah, all that is long past! They have become so hypocritically virtuous now. Now the would-be sirens sit in the glittering rooms, devoutly knitting endless stockings, though sighing all the time after those happy bygone days.

At that time W—— numbered about 20,000 inhabitants; it had a princely castle, a theatre, several handsome streets and magnificent parks. The little court lived there all the winter, and always gave strangers so cordial a welcome that W—— was chosen as a favourite winter resort by many distinguished families, and

birds of passage. Such a little court formed at all times a strong point of attraction; it resembled a centre of crystallisation, drawing round itself affinitive particles. It furnished, in winter, many amusements which can generally only be looked for in larger towns. Added to this was the mild climate, the cheapness of living, the comfort, and the pleasant gossip; so that, even during the worst time of the year, the beautiful walks were seldom quite empty, long trains swept the even paths, and little feet in silk stockings pattered by. Thus W—— always preserved a certain *air de fête*, as the old Princess Algarucki used to say, who had gathered around her a small court, to which, eventually, I had the honour of belonging.

When I arrived there, the brilliant sun from a cloudless sky shone down upon that charming spot; strains of music floated round from morn till eve; gay groups thronged the salons, the parks, the gaming-tables; charming little conveyances overflowed the neighbourhood. But what good was it all to me, an invalid? I could only see it from my window, and even then at the cost of great pain, or afterwards in a helpless invalid carriage. The universal joy and pleasure were to me depressing, almost insulting, because, in the midst of it all, I was alone and miserable. When at last I recovered, could stand upon my feet, and could share in this joyous life—ah! kind reader, in the meanwhile the autumn

had come, and all the mirth was hushed. My newly-awakened longings after pleasure and happiness found little satisfaction, for without all was dead—buried in snow!

A piece of Haydn's music was being performed, called the 'Farewell Symphony,' and composed by the great master, if I mistake not, for a special occasion. The orchestra were playing with all their might, and gladdening the ear with the sweet melody. Then, all at once, while the music is going on, one of the violinists quietly rises, shuts his book with a serious air, takes his instrument under his arm, blows out his light, and goes noiselessly away. See, another rises, the music still continuing, packs up his clarionet, extinguishes his light, and

silently, solemnly glides away. One by one all sadly follow—light after light is extinguished; the place becomes darker and darker, more and more lonely; the music becomes weaker and weaker, and the melody dies away in a melancholy wail. It touches the heart with an indescribable feeling of sadness and sorrow; it seems the death-knell of the summer joy, when its time comes to depart, before the approach of grim winter, the stern monarch of snow and ice. Only four now remain of the many performers; these, too, go their way; their lights are extinguished, it is almost dark; at last one alone is left playing in the wide, deserted room. Then suddenly comes a crash . . . the string snaps, the last light flickers, goes out, the

music is silent, a death-like stillness falls upon the scene—all is over—past, dead!

I was often reminded of this 'Farewell Symphony' during the following weeks in W——. When I was able to move about freely, the last dance had taken place, the season was being borne to its grave, and I was one of the mourners. There was no music now at the morning draught, one had to take one's glass of hot vaporous water without its enlivening strains, and without the sight of the pretty, fresh toilettes, and charming faces—the decline had set in. Now, upon the promenade, instead of the gay, many-coloured throng, you only met solitary, old, shivering men, with high cravats and long coats, who peevishly sipped their

prescribed three glasses, or stood before the barometer, engaged in a long discussion as to the state of the weather. Old ladies, too, were there, with false hair and hideous hats; and asthmatical youths, buttoned up to the chin, who carried their gloves in their pockets, and attempted in vain to assume an interesting air.

These were all that remained of the throng of visitors—these, who for economy's sake arrived at the end of the season, or who were detained on account of their health after others had departed. One took one's morning draught with a shiver, and hurried homewards as quickly as possible. There was nothing to delight the eye, nothing to cause the footsteps to linger. Ennui met one everywhere.

In the parks the dry leaves lay in heaps upon the paths, which formerly were kept as neat as the floor of a lady's boudoir. The autumn wind played and rustled amongst the withered foliage. Ah! that same wind had swept away all the beauty and grace, all the pleasant gaiety, all the luxury and elegance.

In the wide-spreading grounds were only to be met hypochondriacal old men, and old maids suffering from asthma and ill-temper—quiet, gloomy figures with goloshes and Gampish umbrellas. Only a few weeks ago, when I was still in the invalid chair, what a joyous movement was here, what splendid toilettes, what sparkling eyes, what witty conversation, what gay laughter! And now?

Before the electoral palace the swans sit and sleep, dreaming perhaps of better times. All the bright gondolas, round which in the summer they swam in emulation over the broad surface of the water, were drawn to land, and had already commenced their winter in the wooden boathouse. The gilded galley also was gone, in which such a short time ago Prince Allasch and his cavaliers rowed backwards and forwards every evening with those charming sisters of the house of Senzacosta, whose beauty was only equalled by their riches, and whose *recherché* toilettes excited so much envy and admiration.

The fountain no longer played, and under the plane-trees in front of the palace

reigned the stillness of the grave, broken only by the rustling of the yellow leaves performing a weird dance on the bare stems; chairs and benches had been carried away, they were now piled up under shelter, to rest quietly until the bright time came again.

The concert-hall was fastened up with planks of wood, as a protection from the rain and snow during the long winter months. Even the statues were covered up with straw. Why should they be exposed to the wind and storm to charm with their naked beauty the eyes of the few winter guests?

When the bad weather came in November a sort of panic prevailed; all the visitors were eager to take flight before

the approach of the grim enemy. Lines of carriages carried away the departing ones to the railway or the steamboat, and carts, piled up with their luggage, clattered noisily along behind. The hotels put on winter attire; curtains were drawn before the windows; the *table d'hôte* was deserted; the throng of waiters were dismissed.

Strange! I met a man one morning in the street, carrying a little boy in his arms; he had on slippers and a striped woollen jacket, and was comfortably smoking a short pipe. The man saluted me politely, almost familiarly. I turned round and looked after him; he seemed not unknown to me. I puzzled my brains afterwards for full half an hour, as I walked up and down the lonely alley, thinking who

it could be. Suddenly it flashed across me, he was the porter of the Golden Rose. But how on earth could one be expected to recognise a man in a short striped jacket, indulging in a father's harmless delight, and smoking the pipe of peace, whom, till now, one had only seen with an immense cocked hat, dressed in a green, gold-embroidered coat, looking like a Russian general, stroking his long black beard with a commanding air!

One thing only remained of all the glory of the summer, the little palace concert and some reunions excepted—the gaming-tables, and the last dregs of the gamblers. In some bad parts of the town, and in some restaurants of doubtful reputation, could be still heard, at certain times, the

ominous clatter of the dominoes. There men who lived by their wits, mostly Frenchmen, spent their days, drinking their *petits verres*, and raising their voices in angry disputes, terminating ofttimes in deadly quarrels.

CHAPTER II.

THE BARONESS VON MASZMANN.

'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.'

CHAPTER II.

THE BARONESS VON MASZMANN.

THROUGH the long-deserted streets the autumn wind raged in wild fury, then came winter, bringing snow and ice. It was very cold, but still the sun shone brightly, enticing people with its smile out of the hot rooms to bask in its light and warmth. Upon the pond behind the large arbour glided to and fro the many skaters, while on the bank stood figures wrapped in furs, watching the gay throng.

This last company I frequently joined

for I had made several acquaintances by this time, several of which had ripened into friendships. The circle gradually increased, and one of my countrymen having introduced me to the Princess Algarucki, I found myself well provided for during the winter, as I had also been presented at the Electoral Court.

By chance at that time I became very intimate with the President of the police; some official business brought us together, and afterwards I frequently met the jovial little man in society, especially at the roulette-table, where he was a player of the first rank. I mention this here, because I shall afterwards have to refer to it.

The Princess had a reception every evening; she occupied the whole of the

première étage of a private hotel; she was very pleased, also, if any one paid her a visit in the morning, especially if they brought her a little gossip, or could relate a piquant bit of scandal, or retail a *bon mot.* The good-natured, lively old lady took care that her little court was gathered closely under her wing. We could frequent her salons without constraint, and were always sure to meet interesting people; handsome, clever men and charming women from the great world. All the visitors who came to W—— passed in review before her, but she only repeated her invitations to those who pleased her, and the old lady had a keen eye, and was rarely at fault. She was very rich, and in secret did much good to the poor; she

loved cheerfulness and pleasure, was clever and witty without being malicious; she possessed also a precious store of remembrances, for there was scarcely a celebrity whom she had not come across at least once in her many travels, and of whom she could relate some interesting story.

The hospitality in her house was very simple, generally only tea (in cups for the ladies and glasses for the gentlemen) and sandwiches, only on gala days was there anything more. She treated us thus sparingly, not from economy; she did it rather because she knew that luxurious meals attract parasites, as honey the wasps, and that parasites are generally not only vulgar people, but, what is

worse, insufferable bores, whom it is best to keep at a distance.

There was never any lack of intellectual food, of wit and humour, of sparkling conversation among the guests of the Princess. The worshippers of feminine beauty always found something in her salon to attract them; many lost their hearts there, amongst whom was I myself. But it was not in the nature of the Princess to meddle in the affairs of the heart—she ignored them entirely; she knew what an unthankful office it is to play Providence to lovers. But enough of this. To my story.

One of the chief ornaments of the Princess Algarucki's salon was the Baroness Melanie von Maszmann.

The Maszmanns were Courlanders; they lived on their estates in the neighbourhood of Mitau. A severe rheumatic attack of the Baron's, which suddenly assumed a dangerous form, was the cause of their coming to W—— so late in the year. They had rooms in the Golden Rose, opposite me, in the immediate vicinity of the fountain, and only separated from me by the little flower-market.

It is too difficult a task to depict so peculiarly lovely a creature as the Frau von Maszmann; her chief attraction consisted not so much in severely classical features as in the expression of her whole countenance. The charm was more in her manner, in her mind, than in anything which pen or pencil could portray. I

would rather, therefore, describe the first impression she made upon me.

It was in November, about the 8th or 9th, I believe; all the world was hastening with enormous bouquets to Neckar Street, to wish happiness to the Princess on her birthday. I was one of the last of the well-wishers, for a bouquet I had ordered from Frankfort had been delayed, and so I found the salon almost empty when I arrived; and the few who were left arose to depart as I crossed the threshold. My flowers, they were violets of rare beauty, seemed to find great favour in the eyes of the Princess. With a most winning smile, my friendly patroness gave me her lovely hand to kiss, and said to her companion:

'Give the flowers a good place, dear Ellen; put them quite close to my sofa. I give the preference to the fragrance of violets above all other perfumes; I love them as tenderly as a child, the dear little blue flowers!'

We chatted for a time of this and that; then all at once the Princess drew towards her her little jewelled box (out of which she was accustomed to eat sweetmeats all day long), laid her hand upon my arm and said:

'I shall see you again this evening, *mon ami*. We will have a lobster *à la Napolitaine*, your favourite dish, and after the meal a little dance. *Je veux que l'on s'amuse; c'est ma fête aujourd'hui*, Nicolai (this was my Christian name). How is

your mother? Pardon me for not asking for her before. Have you had news lately from home? *À propos*, when you come this evening, you will see a country-woman of yours, a real beauty; I know that you are something of a connoisseur in that line, *méchant que vous êtes!*

The excellent old lady was evidently in a very good humour to-day; she gave me her hand again when I took leave, and as I kissed it respectfully, she touched my forehead with her lips, according to the Russian custom. Her companion, Fräulein von Weber, went with me into the anteroom.

'Who is this country-woman, Ellen Ivanovna?' I asked her, with a little natural curiosity.

'A Baroness Maszmann,' she answered.

'And is she really as beautiful as the Princess affirms ?'

'She is charming.'

'Of what kind of attraction ?'

'Of the most dangerous kind, *le genre sérieux;* but now you must hasten away, that you may return again presently,' she said, and shut the door.

I hurried down the steps, almost running against the sovereign Prince, who was ascending, followed by his adjutant panting under the weight of an enormous bouquet of camellias, as large as a carriage-wheel.

In the evening I arrived at the Princess's in better time than before. There

were a great many people there, as I had expected, consisting for the most part of my own countrymen, for at that time there was a large Russian colony in W——.

I began conversing with the young Prince Wendelstein about breeding fish artificially, and had my back turned to the door, in order to be able to admire, at my ease, Hélène Alexandrowska, a young lady from Moscow, who had made a great impression upon me, and to whom, in my somewhat awkward way, I had begun to pay attentions.

Suddenly the Prince touched me, with a significant look; at the same moment a stillness fell upon the salon; the rustling and talking abruptly ceased. I turned round, it could only be the Frau von

Maszmann who had caused this interruption; all eyes were directed to one point. What a charming woman! A tall, slender figure dressed in dark violet velvet, with dazzling white neck, and above that a small pale countenance, set in a frame of luxuriant black hair, from out of which gazed a pair of large, dark, melancholy eyes, rather near together.

She came alone. She swept through the salon, drawing her long train after her, followed by the looks of all present; she bent before the Princess, and greeted those in her immediate vicinity with perfect grace. Her looks brightened a little, and her mouth attempted a smile, as the old lady, with a friendly look, stretched out both hands in welcome. An involuntary

murmur of applause at her beauty ran through the salon.

'Who is she?' every one asked, and put their heads together behind bouquets and fans.

'What a lovely creature! How charming she is!' said the gentlemen.

'What an air! what an enchanting toilette!' whispered the ladies.

While all the company was thus agitated I stood absorbed in thought, puzzling my brains in vain to remember where I had seen that form before, for I was certain I did not now meet those eyes for the first time. It was some time before it occurred to me, and then it seemed inconceivable that I had not recognised her immediately.

About eight years ago, I was in Berlin. I was then very young, just completing my legal studies. There, in the house of our ambassador, I met several times the Frau von Maszmann, under another name, radiant in all the charms of early youth, and in all the sunshine of happiness. She had recently been married to a German nobleman, Herr von Gleichen. I could not be mistaken, there could not be another such woman. She had now, I presume, lost her first husband, and had married a second time. Strange, though! They said her love for her husband almost amounted to idolatry, and he, on his part, entirely reciprocated her affection. Was his loss, then, the cause of that deep melancholy expression on her coun-

tenance? I remembered her first husband very well; he was a handsome man, with dark hair, known for his goodness, and esteemed as much as his lovely wife for great musical talents.

I heard the story at that time, that his wife fell so desperately in love with him and his music, that she braved all the hindrances placed by her family in the way of their union; and in consequence, so they said, was living at variance with them.

Later on in the evening, when the crowd had somewhat lessened, I was introduced to the Baroness. She did not recognise me. I was but an insignificant boy when I met her in Berlin, whom the much-admired lady would scarcely have

noticed. I did not think it advisable at that moment to remind her of old times.

She was still very lovely, perhaps even more so than she was eight years ago, though the shadow of a great sorrow lay upon her features, and seemed to weigh down her whole being. One could not look into those peculiar dark eyes without being struck by them. A feeling of sympathy stole involuntarily into my soul, in spite of her cold, almost repelling, behaviour.

Strange! I remarked, while she was conversing with the Prince, with her back towards me, that amongst the dark luxuriance of her hair was to be seen already one solitary silver streak.

She had married early—she could be only six or seven-and-twenty at the most. What had turned that hair grey before its time?

Afterwards, while they were dancing, I stood a little on one side and watched the Baroness. I could scarcely take my eyes off her, and sadly neglected my charming partner Hélène Alexandrowska. She had refused to dance round dances, but on the persuasion of the old Prince Wendelstein, consented to take part in a Française. Her dancing was ravishing, in fact, grace itself.

'No wonder,' exclaimed a deep voice behind me; 'her mother was a Pole, a Brinska. I knew her well; she was a beauty. I often danced

with her at the Government balls at Kowno.'

I turned round cautiously and saw in the glass behind me two old men, with high cravats and decorations, conversing in an undertone.

'The Russian dishes to-day were excellent,' said the elder of the two, after a short pause.

His stomach was his god, as every one well knew. The Princess had a cook from St. Petersburg.

He took snuff out of a large gold snuff-box, and flicked the grains from his sleeve with his fingers.

'Yes, excellent,' answered the other, somewhat absently. 'But just look at her now—see the grace in every movement: she

is a study for a painter. Sergei Alexandritsch, it even makes my old heart beat, in spite of my sixty years.'

'Sixty years? Well, her husband is not younger than that,' murmured the other one in his beard, and used his pocket-handkerchief with great energy.

'You know him, Sergei?'

'Yes, why not? When I was stationed at Mitau in the garrison, about twenty years ago, I sometimes met him in society. He had landed estates in the neighbourhood, and was considered a clever and intelligent man. He was then a stately, handsome man, unmarried; he must be older than either of us. Suwarrow was much interested in him and would will-

ingly have given him a place in the Government, but he declined.'

'And she — where did he meet his wife?'

'Ah, that I know not. I see her to-day for the first time. He must have married quite late.'

'They say she has been married before. She has quite the eyes of her mother, but is more imposing in figure.'

'Notice the hidden fire in them. That is the woman, Sergei, to inspire a grand passion. But you are looking at something else.'

'Here comes the punch,' answered the old man, and his features began to evince a lively interest.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

'She must have been very unhappy with her first husband,' I heard afterwards the Countess Draunfels whisper to the Baroness Zumberg, behind her painted fan.

These ladies were playing Russian whist in the next room, at a kreuzer a point.

The Baroness stopped a moment to take some refreshment, and gave a sharp glance at the old lady.

'Yes, my dear,' she resumed; 'she tormented him so with her jealousy that at last he could bear it no longer, and left her. Koscheloff told me all about it a little while ago; he happened to be in Berlin at the time. The story quite formed the topic of the day—very piquant details—you understand?'

She held her fan before her face and laughed maliciously. The Baroness laughed too, and shrugged her bare, thin shoulders.

'She looks like it,' returned the latter, contemptuously; 'do you see what strange eyes she has—like a cat? I believe they shine in the dark.'

'Not quite that, dear Baroness; they are what the French call *un abîme*—fire covered with ashes—a volcano.'

'The abominable women!' indignantly exclaimed the pretty Frau von Baniutin to Ellen Ivanovna. She had heard a part of the foregoing conversation.

'Pardon me, Countess; it is your deal,' interrupted her partner, the Counsellor von Manow, somewhat roughly. She

apologised with an angry look, and the interrupted game was resumed.

In the course of the evening I heard here and there remarks and opinions upon the Frau von Maszmann, more or less friendly, as the case might be. However, they taught me nothing which I did not know before. I learned, to put it shortly, that the first husband of the lady had really left her; but the reasons assigned for the act were so contradictory that one might safely assume them to be invented, or, at least, greatly exaggerated. Several years later she had married the Baron von Maszmann, a Russian nobleman, much older than herself, who completely idolised his young wife. Her character, every one allowed, was quite

blameless. That hidden fire, which sometimes blazed under the long silken eyelashes, emitted rays which could kindle, but gave no warmth. Her heart was as cold as ice—an abyss strewn with ashes. Good heavens! what will not people say of a woman young and handsome as the Baroness?

As for me, her look filled my heart with sadness. I had seen her in the May-day of her life, beloved and esteemed; and now her expression was that of a living death, as if in the midst of all the gaiety that surrounded her she felt her beauty, even her whole existence, to be only a burden too heavy to bear.

I observed her frequently at times, when she thought herself unnoticed:

how fixed her eyes became as they wandered far away from the present scene; how sometimes a deep, painful sigh escaped her. So lovely, and so unhappy! Poor wife!

During the days which followed, all W—— spoke of nothing but the Frau von Maszmann. Every one was in ecstasies, they literally besieged her, and watched eagerly for a chance of seeing her, and of paying court to her. Poor thing! she hardly knew how to defend herself from this sudden enthusiasm.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENE IN THE THEATRE.

'Thus to rob a lady
Of her good name, is an infectious sin
Not to be pardoned.'

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENE AT THE THEATRE.

It was very much against her will, I am sure, that Frau von Maszmann became the lion of the season. Every one sought after her so much that, however she might struggle against it, she was insensibly drawn deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of society. A reunion without her was like a flower without fragrance. The court circle was incomplete without her, and at last she allowed herself to be carried along with the stream. And when her

husband was so far recovered that he could accompany her, they were seen everywhere. Serious and melancholy, but lovely to adoration, she appeared at all the entertainments given in her honour.

The Baron was a tall, distinguished-looking man, with clever, energetic features. When the gout did not trouble him he bore his sixty years well. He was evidently pleased when his wife went into society. He wished her to have pleasure, and, in spite of his affliction, accompanied her everywhere, to balls, routs, and even to the theatre. His goodness and kindness towards her were unvarying; he treated her with the greatest affection, and had more the air of a tender father than of a husband.

On account of the rare beauty of the

Baroness, it naturally resulted that much attention was paid her. Several gentlemen fell in love with her at first sight, and the young Count Eisenberg almost lost his small amount of wits for her sake. The behaviour, however, of the young wife was so exemplary, so full of tact and dignity, that malice could not find the smallest handle against her fair fame. When the most captivating man of his time, the elegant B——, sighed in vain at her feet, the sharpest tongues, even those of her former defamers, the ladies Draunfels and Zumberg, allowed that the Baroness was entirely *comme il faut.* The Princess adored her, and all the little world of W— was full of admiration and curiosity.

In spite of all this excitement the young

Baroness still maintained her grave melancholy air. Only one thing could disperse for a moment the cloud upon her brow, and bring a warmer light to her eyes, a grateful, loving glance at her husband, whose love and tender care of her had indeed something touching in it.

Her boldest admirers found at last that their assaults upon such a heart were in vain—the Baroness was unapproachable. One glance from her dark eyes, one haughty curl of her lip, and the words of the most daring froze upon the tongue, while their eyes sank beneath her gaze.

I lived, as I have already said, just opposite the Golden Rose, where the Maszmanns had taken half the *première étage;* and, in consequence, I saw the

Baroness more frequently than others. I was her neighbour, her *vis-à-vis*.

In her domestic habits she was regularity itself. Every morning when the weather was at all favourable, she went for a long walk at nine o'clock with her little daughter and governess. At twelve she accompanied her husband for a drive in the pony-carriage; later on, as the Baron was now able to walk, she gave him her arm, and led him down the colonnade or the walks of the Palace gardens. She made the walk pleasant by her lively conversation, and watched every footstep with the greatest care.

Sometimes I saw her sitting at the window, occupied with some little feminine work, accompanied by her child, whom

she assisted in her lessons or instructed in needlework.

This child, a maiden of six or seven, was a little cherub, a sweet, gracious creature. She was the delight of my eyes, and I was never tired of looking out of my window to watch the little Nina playing in the garden. I met her also upon the promenade, upon the ice behind the large arbour, where she was taking her first lessons in skating. Between the little white Astracan jacket, and the white hat with a crimson band, shone out her little face, glowing with the active exercise. When she looked up out of her large eyes, she resembled her mother, but *hers* were clear and bright with the innocent joy of childhood, undimmed by a touch of sorrow.

We were very good friends, the little Nina and I; she smiled when she saw me coming in the distance, and, making me a little curtsey, gave me her hand with a pretty 'Bonjour, monsieur.'

Frau von Maszmann generally dressed in black in the day-time, very elegant but very simple. Only some trifle in her attire, a ribbon or a feather, showed that she was not in mourning.

It was chiefly through my friendship with the child that I came to know the parents. I accompanied them sometimes in their walks, and often took an evening cup of tea with them in their family circle. At my suggestion the Baron came now and then to the little Casino, where one could play a game of cards, or read the newspaper.

He was a clever man, of polished manners, and an excellent companion. He was a true Russian nobleman, tall and stately, with broad shoulders and massive brow, decisive in word and action, with much force of character—a thorough man of honour. His good name and his wife were everything to him. He never spoke of his domestic affairs, but he appeared to be particularly happy in his family, notwithstanding the heavy cloud which overshadowed his wife's brow. I remember once his mentioning, accidentally, that he had been a friend of the Baron von Menghden, his wife's father; and on another occasion, he told me that her parents had unfortunately died very early.

As I have already intimated, I had at that time fallen deeply in love with a young lady. The intimacy had commenced during the season, and the much-dreaded winter passed for me only too quickly. I had eyes only for Hélène von Alexandrowski, upon whom my affections were riveted. As she plays no prominent *rôle* in this history, I will renounce my desire to draw her portrait for the reader, as if I attempted it, he would accuse me of exaggeration. I was drawn more and more towards the star which attracted me, and on that account, my watchfulness over Frau von Maszmann became considerably lessened.

Even in a salon or a ball-room, lovers are as good as alone; they have eyes only

for one another, and all other people seem to them nothing but lay figures.

I met the Baroness in society as frequently as before, but my interest in her gradually became less keen.

* * * * *

One evening I was at the theatre, in one of the small boxes, by the side of Hélène Alexandrowska. The company were performing 'Il Trovatore' for the first time, and the house was full to overflowing with a glittering mass of people. The heat was almost stifling, and towards the end of the second act, a man in one of the stage boxes was carried out in a fainting condition.

All eyes were turned in that direction; for a time all was bustle and confusion;

they said he was a foreigner, an American.

'For pity's sake,' suddenly whispered Hélène, in a terrified voice, 'look at the Baroness!'

I glanced furtively in the direction indicated by my inamorata. In the second box next to us sat the Frau von Maszmann; she was as pale as death, and looked as if turned to stone. Deep shadows lay upon her eyes, her cheeks were colourless. She held her handkerchief to her mouth, while, with dilated pupils, she gazed into vacancy.

I was struck to the heart by her look. I expected every moment to see her also fall into a swoon. And no wonder, what with the heat, the entrancing thrill of

Verdi's music, the many odours of scent which floated round (a hateful, unhealthy custom), and above all, the sight of that fainting man! I was about to spring to her help, to fetch a glass of water, to do something, when fortunately, at that moment, the curtain fell.

During the rapturous applause from the gallery, the Baroness rose, pale, rigid as a statue, still holding her handkerchief to her lips, with the same fixed look in her eyes, and walked out with wavering, uncertain steps. On all sides gentlemen tendered her their services, but with a single movement of her hand she waved them back—she would be alone. She drew her fur tippet closely round her, and descended the stairs. I followed her

anxiously. She looked round, and, perceiving me, threw me such an angry glance that I involuntarily recoiled.

In great surprise I re-entered the house, and seated myself at Hélène's side.

'Her countenance changed when she saw the stranger faint,' said Hélène, compassionately; 'there must be something infectious in it.'

'I can well believe it,' I answered; 'the sight of the unconscious man, as they carried him out like one dead, must have terrified her; she would not even accept my help. You should have seen how her eyes flashed upon me—almost with anger; I suppose she was ashamed of her weakness, and yet I only meant to call a carriage for her.'

'Such spoilt princesses have nerves like fine threads,' I heard a harsh voice say on the other side, and I did not need to turn round to recognise the Baroness Zumberg. 'How ridiculous, dear Countess!'

'You are right, my dear,' returned the Countess Draunfels, eagerly; 'if a little heat gives people such vapours, they should stay at home, they have no business to go to the theatre. She looked like a corpse—dreadful!'

'She always wraps herself up so high,' said the Baroness, scornfully, 'why cannot she put on a reasonable dress like other people? When the court is in residence, it is proper for people of rank to appear *décolleté*, with flowers in their hair. Is it

not so, dear Lord Chamberlain?' she said to a gentleman, who stood in an elegant attitude behind her chair.

Hélène smiled significantly at me. The Baroness always wore her dresses cut very low, not at all to her advantage.

'I do not think, Baroness, that it was entirely the heat,' returned the Lord Chamberlain, with a diplomatic smile, at the same time offering the lady some chocolate pastilles out of a little silk bag; then the three put their heads close together, and began to chatter.

Woe betide the unhappy creature who should fall under the lash of *their* tongues! The Chamberlain was, if possible, the greatest old woman of the three, and had

the sharpest tongue. At last I heard him say :

'There's the rub, ladies, you may be sure—as the old song has it,

'"Pour jeune femme, il faut jeune mari."

And now, *au revoir ;* I must go back to his Highness : the bell has already rung for the next scene.'

With a low bow and a significant pressure of the hand, he moved away.

'Oh, how wicked and amusing he is!' tittered the Baroness as he left, fanning herself violently.

'Hush, my dear! the curtain is going up!'

I had long forgotten this trifling and in itself insignificant occurrence, till later cir-

cumstances brought it vividly to my recollection.

* * * *

After that day the Baroness remained for some time unknown; she was seen nowhere, neither at the theatre nor in society, and her husband still more rarely. He told me his wife was ill, suffering from a nervous affection; she was not accustomed to so much gaiety, and must now rest for awhile. The Princess also, with genuine anxiety, confirmed the Baron's statement.

I was rather a favourite of hers, and she said many things to me which she kept secret from others. She said that I was an exception to the general rule, that I could understand the art of silence. Good

old lady, how very much she was mistaken in me!

The Princess led a strange life. She lay in bed every day, with a few occasional exceptions, until five o'clock. She took her chocolate and a glass of Hungarian wine with a slice of meat, which constituted her second breakfast; after which she received her intimate friends, in the style of the ladies of the period of Louis Quatorze. At six o'clock she dined in the greatest *négligé;* and then, after dinner, came in its turn the toilette. When this critical point was reached, I discreetly departed—no mortal could behold that with impunity.

This way of living suited the Princess marvellously well, and kept her quite

young. In her seventieth year she had not a finger-ache; she still preserved the full activity of her mind, and indeed always looked, in full toilette of course, a handsome, imposing old lady. Her figure was upright, her eyes had not lost their fire, her teeth were her own, and her mouth could still laugh. In her youth she had been a beauty, the star of her time; and the last glow of evening still remained to her, a reflection of her former splendour. A noble mind always sets its stamp upon the countenance, and it was this, added to her unvarying amiability, which attracted all hearts to her. Wicked people said she ate arsenic—but I am digressing.

As I have said, I was one of the most intimate friends of the Princess; she con-

sidered me a character to be depended upon; she obtained through me her money from her banker. When her little dog Lucie was ill, I must give advice, and if any little unpleasantness occurred to her, she called me to her aid.

One morning I sat by her bedside, my hat upon my knees, while she, half concealed by the curtains, took her usual cup of chocolate.

'I was obliged to beg you to come, Nicolas,' she said, with a certain air of secrecy.

'Your Highness is very gracious,' I answered.

I looked into my hat, and wondered what was to come next; evidently it was something particular to-day. Surely her

grand-nephew Alexander, cornet in a regiment of cuirassiers at St. Petersburg, could not have been running into debt again.

'Will you have the goodness to call Marie?' she said, without looking up.

I rose and rang the bell. The waiting-maid came and carried away the breakfast. As soon as the girl had left the room, the Princess began suddenly:

'For Heaven's sake! what do you think of the Baroness Maszmann? Is she out of her mind?'

'The Baroness!' I stammered, gazing at her half in amazement, half in terror.

She raised herself a little, rested her elbow on the pillow, with a serious

thoughtful look on her features. For a moment silence reigned in the room.

Suddenly the Princess lifted her head, and fixed her black eyes anxiously on my countenance.

'Listen, Nicolas,' she said quickly, laying her hand on my arm, 'what wicked tale is this about the Baroness? You know—— I love her as my own daughter, and I fear she is making unhappiness for herself.'

I felt very uneasy and astonished at these words.

'You do not believe me?' she continued, shaking her head. 'You look incredulous —I assure you it can be no longer doubted —I am quite beside myself at the thought of it; the woman has a secret passion—a lover!'

'Your Highness!'

'Hush! be silent. You are quite a child in such matters. I am vexed beyond measure, but I fear it is too true. If it were only an ordinary old woman's tale, I should laugh at it, but——'

The old lady considered for a moment, gazing fixedly at her silken coverlet.

Suddenly she drew a deep breath, and continued:

'You know, Nicolas, I would never believe anything of the sort—I despise silly gossip, and should be ashamed to repeat it! That is the business of petty, commonplace people, who do not know how to employ their time better.'

Here she laid her hand again upon my

arm, and fixed her large eyes impressively upon me.

'But there is something more in this report. Only just now I showed the Baroness Zumberg the door when she came telling me about it. Twice every day I have ordered my people to send away the Countess Draunfels, and have talked the greatest nonsense to the Hofmarschall von Bücking—but, after all, the affair cannot be kept secret. Ah! it is sad, very sad, *mon ami!*'

I sat there quite confused, becoming more and more agitated at this disquieting communication.

'But I entreat your Highness,' I objected.

'Listen, Nicolas,' she continued, almost

in a whisper. 'You know for some time past she has been suffering: she gives out that she is ill, and does not go out. She seemed to disappear all at once. Well! nevertheless she has been remarked here and there, by one and another. She has been seen in the twilight, closely disguised, stepping into a miserable fiacre; she has been out in the evening, in all weathers, going quickly down the most lonely streets —her face veiled, her umbrella held before her, as if she were afraid of being recognised.'

'Well, yes—that is possible—what conclusion do you draw from that?'

The old lady shook her head irritably.

'She has been followed, Nicolas, several times. Every evening, when her husband

is from home, she goes the same way, past the theatre, down Neckar Street, to the second turning off the Old Mound, then up this to a house, No. 3, Garden Road. It is a lonely villa, quite out of the world, half way up the hill. Here live two old people, Herr Köhler and his wife, and with them resides a lodger, an American named Constantine Williams. He is put down in the visitor's list as a private gentleman from New Orleans.'

I was about to reply, but the Princess did not give me time.

'Listen, Nicolas,' she continued impressively: 'you are a friend of the Baron's and Mélanie's. Will you go to the Golden Rose, try to see the Baroness alone, and beg her to come to me to-day, at whatever

hour suits her? I will give her a hint—I will act a mother's part to her: she needs some counsel, some warning. And then, Nicolas, you must find out who this stranger is—this American. I wish to know. They say he is an eccentric man, a sort of hermit. Do you understand? Prove yourself as discreet as wise, dear friend.' She sighed deeply, and again gazed thoughtfully before her.

'How is your little Alexandrowska?' she resumed, after a pause, suddenly changing the conversation.

I coloured slightly.

'She is a pretty girl, and of good family; I will intercede for you if you require it. You are at an age, Nicolas, when a man ought to marry. But now

leave me, that you may return the sooner, and bring me complete information. *Adieu, mon ami—au revoir.*'

I made a low bow, and went out.

Much distressed by what I had just heard, I hastened down the steps.

'What a strange, sad affair!' I said to myself; 'the Princess must be mistaken.' But no, there must be something in it. For days and weeks I have frequently seen the Baroness seated at the window, weeping, or watched her shadow in the evening as she wandered restlessly up and down the room. Little Nina takes her morning walks alone with her governess; her mother never accompanies her now. But I have seen her several times clasp the child passionately to her breast, pale and

tearful. And then—have I not twice myself met the Baroness out in fog and darkness, thickly veiled to avoid recognition? I knew her by her walk, her carriage. I looked after her in astonishment, and murmured, 'Gracious Heaven, was not that the Baroness?' Yes! all cannot be right, there must be some mystery. One glance at the death-like countenance of the beautiful woman as she stands at the window and, full of sorrow, gazes up at the stars as if to find consolation there, tells its tale of woe.

These thoughts lay like a heavy sorrow upon my heart. I had regarded her as something holy, something to be worshipped, and now she sank suddenly to the dust; her name was in people's

mouths — and what people! Good heavens!

I went with hasty steps down Neckar street, turned into the grounds of the Old Mound, and went along Garden Road. This was a narrow path between hedges, which led steeply up the hill. There were only two or three houses in it, far apart from one another.

Why—where had been my thoughts? That villa over there at the corner belonged to the Baniutins, I had frequently been there with my beloved Hélène. Their house was a very pleasant one, and the lady very handsome and agreeable.

How could I be so forgetful? It was exactly here I stood one evening in the

moonlight with Consul Scheffler and his charming wife. We were coming from the Baniutins, and were in very gay spirits, laughing and joking all the way. Suddenly Hélène stood still, and said 'Hush!' Our talking ceased at once —we listened.

Some one in a house close by was playing upon a violin. We drew nearer; a faint light glimmered behind closely-drawn curtains. One side of the window was open, and the unknown played on in a masterly manner, holding us entranced. We stood underneath, breathless, without moving, and listened for a quarter of an hour. We could not tear ourselves away until the music had ceased, although it was very sad. It must have been over there

at No. 3, the very house. I stepped across through the snow—the number was on the gate. He must live here, that American.

I looked at the house closely; it lay back a little from the road in a garden—a little unassuming villa, with five windows in front, and three stories. The blinds were all drawn down except one, which was about half way up, and behind which I caught a glimpse of curtains of blue silk.

Against the iron railings I saw the bell, and under this a highly-polished brass plate with the words 'Gustave Köhler, ducal Registrator.'

I went past the house; the road continued on, but there were only gardens

and fields higher up—No. 3 was the last of the houses.

I stood still for a moment considering. Should I go in? It was not curiosity which prompted these inquiries, but genuine interest and sympathy.

'Go on, Nicolas,' I said to myself, and turned again resolutely. With a beating heart I went back, once more scanned the house, window after window, then laid my hand upon the bright knob. The sound of a bell was audible, and at the same moment the garden-door sprang open as if by magic, while the long wire which connected it with the house still vibrated.

Inside, the snow was carefully swept away, leaving a little path. Up this she has passed, I thought to myself, and I

even looked for her footprints in the damp earth. Slowly I approached the house; the door stood half open. I crossed the threshold and found myself confronted by an elderly woman with a shrewd, intellectual face, and looking like a lady, although very simply dressed.

As she stood there and looked at me expectantly, it flashed across my mind that I did not actually want anything. I was in a dilemma; nevertheless, I composed myself.

'Frau Köhler, I believe?' I said, with a bow.

'At your service, sir.'

'I wish to inquire of you—you let lodgings, madame?'

'Yes, we have some rooms for strangers,' she answered politely.

'A gentleman has been living here for some time, an American of the name of Williams.'

The expression of the woman's countenance suddenly changed; she gave me a sharp look, folded her arms, and threw back her head. There was an involuntary defiance in this gesture. 'How does that concern you?' it unmistakably said.

'Is the gentleman at home?' I continued.

'Your pardon, sir; are you one of the friends of Mr. Williams?' was her reply, accompanied by another searching look.

'Well, no, not exactly,' I answered, somewhat embarrassed.

There was something in the woman's countenance which made me feel quite disconcerted, especially as my conscience was not quite clear.

'I only ask, because, if not, I must tell you that the gentleman is ill, and receives no one,' she said shortly; 'may I ask you for your card, that I may carry it to him?'

'I will come again, when your lodger is better; my name does not matter.'

'Indeed!' said the lady, with a stern look.

'I bid you good-day, madame.'

'Adieu!'

I stood outside the gate with a very uncomfortable feeling; I was evidently not intended for a diplomatist. This will be a

nice tale for the Princess, if she hears it; she will scold me well.

I returned slowly homewards, ashamed of myself, not daring even to look round. I went straight to the Casino, and entered the reading-room. I took up the visitor's list, and began to turn over the leaves. Ah, here it is—'Herr Constantine Williams, private gentleman, New Orleans, America; Madame Köhler's, No. 3, Garden Road.'

Constantine! A strange Christian name for an American! This list was dated September 29th. I turned further back, there it was again—'Constantine Williams, Hôtel Victoria.' So he put up there, before he retired to that lonely villa.

I rose immediately, and went down Neckar Street, towards the hotel. As I

passed the Princess's, I saw the Countess Draunfels; she darted out of the house with a red and angry face, and stepped into her carriage. She has been shown the door again, I thought, and rubbed my hands.

Arrived at the Hôtel Victoria, I asked for the stranger's book, and began to question the porter. I could learn but little, only that Mr. Williams was a tall, dark man, about five-and-thirty years old, and very much afflicted; he had come to W—— to try the waters.

A tall, thin man, with dark hair sprinkled with grey, very gloomy, and sparing of his words. Good heavens! it was impossible that the Baroness could have fallen in love with this man! I did not believe a word

of the whole story—it was a mistake—a slander. Perhaps it was some unknown poor man, some invalid, whom she was supporting. The world is *so* wicked!

I went home, but I was not satisfied. I will lie in ambush, I thought. 'No, Nicolas, that you will not do,' said my conscience; 'never mind the disappointment and anger of the Princess; it is wrong to be suspicious—mean to be a spy!'

From this time I looked less than before at the window of the Golden Rose, and listened in silence and humility when I was reproached for having so ill-fulfilled my mission.

During the next fortnight I could not but notice the old gentleman, the Baron

Maszmann. Something strange had evidently happened to him: he was quite changed — a threatening cloud lay ever upon his brow. Merciful heaven! could that slanderous tale have reached his ears? One could scarcely doubt it, his countenance was so troubled. An indescribable feeling of anxiety seized my heart, a presentiment of coming evil. Ah! it was fulfilled all too soon. It was like the lightning which flashes out of the dark cloud, then comes the thunderclap, bringing destruction and terrifying men's hearts.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAGEDY.

'Let us meet
And question this most bloody piece of work,
To know it farther.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAGEDY.

I WAS very fond of a game of cards, and several times a week was accustomed to join a party at ombre in the little Casino.

The President of police and two other gentlemen, a retired colonel, and a country squire, with my unworthy self, were constant players.

The Baron von Maszmann, also, came in pretty regularly in the evening to play whist, or watch the other games.

It was one Wednesday in March. Very bad weather had set in, dark clouds rolled down from the mountains, and the wind dashed the heavy rain-drops against the window-panes, as if some one from outside were throwing large handfuls of peas at them.

We sat in the comfortable little card-room of the Casino, and played our game, quite absorbed in the cards. The blue smoke of the cigars filled the room with a soft mist, and in the glasses sparkled the golden Rhine wine. I noticed casually, as the President was dealing, his dark eyes glance towards the door, and involuntarily I followed their gaze.

I was terrified. The Baron von Maszmann was just entering; he looked as pale

as a dead man; with darkly-frowning brow, and eyes fixed, he stood at the door, dripping with rain.

He shook himself and looked round, as if seeking some one, till his eyes fell upon the Hofmarschall von Bücking. A gleam of hate seemed to shoot from under his half-closed lids when he perceived him. Without noticing any of us, he went straight across, and laid his hand heavily upon his shoulder.

The Hofmarschall looked up, somewhat frightened, laid down his cards, and rose hastily, with a confused smile. Both retired into the next room.

The President threw me a significant glance from his sharp eyes. It made me tremble, without knowing why. I felt an

unutterable anxiety; a confused picture of the imagination flitted across the mirror of my soul. I seemed to see a serpent coiling itself round a lion. I had just the feeling that I must spring up and rush into that other room, to prevent some dreadful calamity.

'It is your turn to play,' said my partner.

Mechanically I drew a card.

'I have something to say to you afterwards,' whispered the President in my ear. 'Look at that wretched creature over there! I believe he rejoices in his villany —the Jesuit!'

I looked up, and saw the Hofmarschall von Bücking re-entering the room, still smiling, apparently well satisfied with himself, and rubbing his hands. His large,

thin mouth reached almost from ear to ear, and his small eyes twinkled with delight.

'Forgive me, gentlemen, if I have kept you waiting,' he simpered, and threw himself affectedly into a chair. 'Waiter, bring me a light—a small matter of business—a bagatelle,' he added, between the puffs of his cigar.

The President looked sternly at him, and then murmured:

'The Baron is gone?'

'Yes, he is gone.'

What could he have wanted with that man? The Hofmarschall was the centre of all the gossip in W——, a malicious indiscreet fellow, whose whole delight was in scandal.

And then the Baron's gloomy countenance, his rigid look, his strange behaviour! A shiver stole over me—I could think but of one thing—what could have happened? What is he going to do? Have they had a quarrel, or is it something else?

I should like to have sprung up and hastened after the Baron, or have seized the Hofmarschall by the throat and said to him, 'Confess, fellow, what have you done?'

I was greatly excited, and made mistake after mistake in the game.

Half an hour passed away; I sat upon thorns the whole time.

The door opened noiselessly, and the head of the landlord appeared.

'The President of police is wanted,' he said cautiously, and disappeared.

Herr von Simmern finished the deal quickly, and rose.

'One moment, gentlemen,' he said apologetically, and went out.

We others sat and waited. The Colonel abused the weather and complained of his stiff knee, while the other ordered his third pint. *They* did not make themselves uneasy because the chief of the police had been called out; that happened very often; such an important official must do without sleep. *I*, on the contrary, sat on thorns, with a feeling as if an icy hand were laid upon my heart.

'You are not quite well to-day,' began

the Colonel, looking at me with sympathy. 'No wonder; in this miserable weather every one suffers.'

At this moment the President returned. I looked at him—there was something peculiar in his countenance, a sort of fixed resolution. I know not why, but I sprang from my seat as if by an irresistible impulse.

He said nothing, but made a slight movement with his head, and stepped into the recess of a window. In a moment I was at his side.

'Keep your countenance,' he whispered, seizing my hand with a firm, sharp pressure.

'Well?' I stammered anxiously.

'A great calamity has taken place—

come with me immediately—I have already sent for a carriage.'

My heart stood still.

'Good God—the Baroness!' I exclaimed, trembling.

'Hush! not a word! Go out and get ready; I will make our apologies here.'

I could have shrieked aloud in my anxiety, but I was obliged to restrain myself, so as not to excite suspicion by my behaviour.

'Great God, have mercy!' I groaned, and left the room.

I was hardly ready when the President again joined me. He spoke a few words to the landlord, and drew me to the door. Outside in the pouring rain stood two

police officers. I could restrain myself no longer.

'Tell me, I implore you, what has happened!' I asked, trembling.

The President seized my arm, bent his head to my ear, and whispered:

'A very sad tale—the Baron is shot!'

'Merciful Heaven!' I said in terror. 'The unhappy man! Has he killed himself?'

'They say he is dead,' he replied, 'but we shall see for ourselves. I am not fond of allowing myself to be prejudiced beforehand by the reports of others; it leads only to false conjectures, and then one loses the track from the beginning.'

At this moment Herr von Simmern was quite the official. He stood there in the

flickering light of the door-lamp, and appeared to be meditating with a calm and serious expression, while I was trembling with agitation and grief.

'I have requested you to accompany me because I thought you might be of some use, my dear Bagdanoff; you are intimately acquainted with the Maszmanns. But, thank God, here comes the carriage! jump in, my friend.'

We sprang in, one of the policemen placed himself on the box, the horses started, and we rolled away.

What fearful ideas rushed through my mind as we hastily traversed the streets, not without some danger, on account of the thick darkness! The scanty street-lamps glided past like faint will-o'-the-

wisps. I wished to ask many questions, but by the fitful light I could see that the President was entirely occupied with his own thoughts, and I did not like to disturb him.

At last he began:

'That cursed Bücking, I will swear that he is at the bottom of it! But let him beware, the wretch! I will make him hear of it. If I am not mistaken in my supposition, I will go straight to the Prince to-morrow: he is a real pest to the town—to the whole land—a parasite—a sneak—it is his whole business to make mischief!'

'But, for Heaven's sake, tell me what has happened?'

'Listen!' he laid his hand upon my

knee. 'I have just had a report from Sergeant Stagmann that in the Garden Road a distinguished man, a stranger, is lying mortally wounded. A woman, the wife of Herr Köhler, came into the police-office breathless, pale as death, to make the announcement. She also added that the Baron was murdered by another gentleman, an American, who for some time past has been lodging with them, and has been in all respects a quiet, orderly man, in an infirm state of health; the quarrel took place on account of a lady, the wife of the wounded man, and apparently some relation to the American.'

I gave utterance to a deep sigh.

'So that is it,' I stammered in terror.

'The woman further said, the stranger

had come to their house about half-past nine; her husband would have sent him away, but he said he was a friend, and, pushing them aside, ascended the stairs. Immediately a shot was heard, and when they both hastened to the spot in great terror, they found the gentleman lying upon the ground in mortal agony, with the still smoking pistol by his side. The woman left her husband with the dead body, and herself hastened to the town to announce to the authorities what had happened. That, my dear Bagdanoff, is what I have heard. But here we are at the place.'

The carriage was just turning into a dark street, lighted only by a single oil-lamp at the corner; it stopped, the

policeman jumped down and opened the door.

In spite of the darkness and the bad weather some people had collected, and stood by the railings, talking loudly with one another. I heard their murmurs and muttered curses as I descended from the carriage, with the policeman's warning 'Stand back!'

When the crowd recognised, by the light of the carriage-lamp, the serious countenance of the chief of the police, they became silent and stepped back. One solitary voice exclaimed wildly over the heads of the others:

'So a murder has been committed in W——! Drag the hound away to prison —make short work with him!'

'Hold your noise!' called out another, 'here come the President and the doctor.'

'Silence!' cried the policeman, and began to disperse the people roughly, to prove his active zeal.

Through a line of dark figures we entered the little garden; the gate was closed behind us. With a sorrowful heart I looked up. There, behind that lighted curtain, in that same room where not long ago the sweet tones of the violin had fallen softly on our ears, had this terrible thing been done. Good God! what were we about to see?

We entered the house. A policeman stood on guard at the foot of the stairs, down which a terrified maid-servant was

hastening, carrying some blood-stained linen in her hand.

The policeman gave his superior a short, whispered report; then we silently ascended the stairs, and arrived upon a small corridor, dimly lighted by a lamp.

The President listened a moment, and then opened a door.

My heart almost stopped beating. 'God, have mercy!' I prayed in silence.

He went first and stepped into the room, I remained as if spell-bound upon the threshold.

A terrible sight met my gaze. At one end of a large, well-lighted room stood a bed, with its dark curtains drawn back so that the light fell clearly upon the pillow

and coverlet. Between them I perceived the head of a man, whose pale, deathlike countenance was surrounded by a profusion of dark hair, and a large black beard. His eyes were closed, and a thin waxen hand lay motionless upon the silken coverlet.

Bending over this strange form, and almost hiding it with the upper part of her body, was an elegantly-attired, womanly figure. I recognised her at once. Good heavens! it was the Baroness—her whole frame quivered convulsively.

At the head of the bed stood a small table; on it some medicine bottles and a hand-bell. Underneath, on the carpet, lay a half-open book, and close by a small double-barrelled pistol. Farther off, in

the middle of the room, lay the Baron, stretched out in a pool of blood. Over him knelt an elderly man, attempting to stop the blood which continually welled out of a wound in his left side.

'He is dying!' whispered Herr Köhler (for it was he); 'it is all over with him,' as he looked up with an expression of horror. 'Terrible!' he murmured, 'and in my house, too!'

At this moment that dark feminine form rose hastily from the stranger's bed, as if just aroused from a fearful dream, and turned round to us. With a despairing gesture she drew her hand through her long black hair, which fell around her in entangled masses to her waist. Her large lustreless eyes gazed at us fixedly;

then a shudder ran through her whole frame, and, wringing her hands, she groaned:

'Unhappy creature that I am—I have killed him!'

Such an expression of deep, overwhelming anguish showed itself in her voice and in her whole appearance, that even the chief of the police had something like tears in his eyes.

I have seen many things in my life which might shake the nerves of a resolute man. I was in the Caucasus, where I experienced something of the horrors of war—man opposed to man. I was in Poland during the last rebellion, and witnessed many terrible scenes; but never have I felt such deep anguish, such unspeakable,

heartfelt pain, as at this sight in this quiet room.

What a fearful, appalling drama!

All was still—the lamp burnt peacefully. Only a smothered groan was heard at intervals, or a gust of wind rattled the window, or the rain dashed gloomily upon the panes.

But upon what unutterable misery did that lamp shine! The destruction of three lives!

I clasped my hands convulsively, and hot tears stood in my eyes.

A sign from the President arrested my movements; a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders, and the officer began to perform his duty.

His sharp glance took in the whole room

—not an object, not a corner appeared to escape him. Then he stepped on one side, and slowly bent over the wounded man.

'The bleeding is ceasing a little,' whispered the registrator to him, pressing his hand firmly upon the Baron's side.

Herr von Simmern nodded his head without answering, and began to subject the hand of the Baron to a minute examination.

'Shall I render some assistance there?' I asked cautiously, indicating the group on the other side.

'Do not move. The doctor must be here in a moment,' he returned decidedly, and again bent over the form of the Baron. He beckoned me to bring him a light.

With the greatest care he continued his examination, as if he wished to discover something particular on those hands, which might afford him some explanation of the fearful deed that had taken place.

The left hand was uncovered; there was a mourning ring on it, and the heavy signet ring engraved with the Baron's arms, but not the least mark was to be found. The right hand had on a glove of brown deer-skin—it was damp with rain, and on the inner side of the forefinger, at the lower joint, was to be seen a long narrow pressure.

'Do you see this?' whispered the President cautiously to me; 'look closely at this faint mark on the damp leather! What do you think it is?'

I bent lower over the wounded man, and knelt down in order to examine him more closely. I held the light of the taper as near as possible to the hand, while I felt the eyes of the officer resting upon me expectantly.

'Good God! it is the impression of the trigger of a pistol,' I said, looking up.

Our eyes met significantly for a second, and then were directed simultaneously to the little murderous instrument which lay upon the carpet.

'That is quite a new version of the affair,' murmured the President, and slowly shook his head. 'A suicide!'

There was something in his voice and manner which showed how difficult it was

for him to believe it—to admit this fresh thought into his circle of ideas.

At this moment hasty steps were heard outside, the door opened noisily, and a man entered with a forbidding countenance and rough grey hair—it was the doctor.

'Well! what is the matter? Ah! there it lies!' he exclaimed, and nodded a hasty greeting to us. He laid aside his overcoat, which was dripping with rain, and turned up his cuffs.

'May I beg you to be a little more quiet?' said the President, warningly, with a reproachful look, pointing to the Baroness.

'Ah, indeed!' growled the doctor, and threw a piercing look in the same direction,

slightly drawing down the corners of his mouth. 'Only a swoon, apparently,' he said, shrugging his shoulders, and gave his attention to the wounded man.

He drew the shirt aside, and, with Herr Köhler's help, turned the heavy body more upon its back; then he wiped his spectacles and commenced his examination. This caused him to frown deeply and shake his head, as he laid his instruments upon the floor beside him.

'Right through the left lung,' he growled. 'Will you kindly give orders, Herr President, to have a bed prepared immediately for the Baron? he needs the utmost care. Keep the compress here, registrator,' he added, turning to him—'cold water, nothing more at first, and the greatest quiet.'

He rose, shook himself slightly, and then approached the bed.

The Baroness looked at him with a fixed and glassy stare; she passed her hand quickly across her brow, as if she would drive away some hateful picture, and gave utterance to a slight cry. Only a hasty glance did the doctor vouchsafe the lady, a glance which seemed to me the spiteful look of a mean soul, delighted to see a noble lady in such a position; then he bent over the fainting man, and laid his hand upon his breast.

At this the Baroness rose upright, and drew a step back. Slightly bending forward, she appeared to be listening intently, while she stretched out her hands as if

warding off something, keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon the doctor.

'A deep swoon,' he said, turning to us. 'Water—ice!' he commanded sharply.

I hastened out, and sent the servant to procure what was necessary, as quickly as possible.

In the meanwhile the doctor took the water, which had been used to cool the Baron's wound, and sprinkled a little on the fainting man's face. The drops rolled slowly off his forehead, leaving behind them light reddish marks which stained the pillow.

'Blood—blood!' shrieked the unhappy woman, wringing her hands in horror; 'I —wretch that I am!—I have killed him—he is dying!'

I scarcely had time to spring to her help —I put my arm round her, and begged her to calm herself. A shiver ran through her from head to foot, her features became deathly pale, and like a dead thing she sank slowly to the ground.

'Go out and see that a room is being prepared—the Baron must be taken to bed at once—he will die under our hands,' said the President, with a movement of the hand. 'But stay—one moment,' he continued, seizing me by the arm; 'you know the Baron's family physician?'

'Certainly. Dr. Wilhelmi.'

'Then take the carriage which is waiting below, hasten to him, and bring him here. You will probably find him at home now.'

He pushed me out.

With a heavy heart I threw myself into the carriage and drove away.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAGEDY—*continued.*

'He slept at last,
A troubled, dreamy sleep. Well—had he slept
Never to waken more! His hours are few,
But terrible his agony.'

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAGEDY—*continued.*

FORTUNATELY I found the Doctor at home. I hastily imparted to him what had happened. For one moment he was horrified, but quickly recollecting himself, he put some necessary medicines into his coat-pockets and we drove back to the scene of death. On the way I related the details, as far as I knew them.

'A suicide!' he cried, shaking his head. 'And the Baroness—I could not have believed it possible. What a position for

her husband! What a terrible struggle must take place in a man's heart! Such a sight would rouse all the evil passions of man's nature, and madden him with the determination to kill either the false lover or the guilty wife! But a man of principle, of kindness of heart, would almost rather turn the muzzle of the pistol against himself!'

'That is indeed the most cruel, the most terrible vengeance that it is possible for a man to take!' I cried, almost beside myself.

'Certainly,' answered the Doctor, with a gloomy brow. 'If he destroys himself, it is threefold, hundredfold death for the guilty. And the Baroness! Such an amiable, lovely woman—I could have

sworn that her soul was as pure as gold!'

'Ah, I could have done so also, Doctor. And still even now, in spite of that fearful testimony, in spite of that terrible cry, that self-accusation, "I have killed him!" I cannot—I will not believe that this model of a true lady in a few short weeks could be untrue to all her principles, untrue to honour itself—that she could become a fallen woman. My whole feelings revolt from it. There is some mystery here—God grant it may be explained!'

It seemed to me as if some light from heaven must come down to illuminate this darkness, to tear away this dark veil. If this woman is a fallen one, if those noble features, that angelic beauty, are nothing

but a lie — in what can one believe again?

We entered the room. The wounded man had been removed into an adjoining apartment. But there lay the American in the same place, more resembling a corpse than a living being, while by his couch knelt the unhappy lady, apparently praying.

Outside, with the chief of the police, were the magistrate and his clerk, to make the legal investigation.

The Doctor stepped up to the bed, the President gave me a sign to come to him.

'The affair is becoming complicated: look here,' he whispered softly, and pointed to the weapon he held in his hand. 'We

have been mistaken, Bagdanoff, see—it was the barrel, not the trigger, of the pistol which left that mark upon the glove.'

He held out to me both the pistol and the glove; it was true, the impression on the leather exactly fitted the barrel.

Perplexed, terrified, I gazed at the President, and murmured something, I know not what.

'So it was not he who fired that deadly shot,' he rejoined, in a scarcely audible voice. 'There is no impression of a trigger upon the glove — this is no suicide.'

'Merciful God!' I stammered in perplexity.

My gaze wandered involuntarily to the

couch, where the Doctor was occupied with the sick man, and was just then applying a bottle of strong salts to his nose.

'A murder then!' cried a voice in my ear, and the room began to turn with me.

But I would not, I could not believe it; there are things one cannot believe, in spite of the strongest evidence.

Nevertheless, one thing was clear. There lay a man, mortally wounded, with a shot in his breast, and though he had had the pistol in his hand, he had not fired it himself. Wild ideas rushed through my brain like a flood. Terrible pictures presented themselves to my imagination! I saw the Baron, informed and goaded on

by the Hofmarschall, entering this room, pistol in hand, to avenge his violated honour. I saw him standing, pale and threatening, where now that pool of blood covered the floor. Stern in his righteous wrath, he held the weapon in his hand, pointed straight at the stranger. I saw the wife, paralysed with terror, standing by; she saw the deadly weapon raised, directed full at the heart of her beloved—she uttered a shriek—threw herself upon her angry husband, and seized his arm. 'Have mercy!' she cried, 'spare him!' There was a short struggle—then a fearful accident—the pistol was discharged into the husband's breast! Mortally wounded, he sank like a dead man to the earth—steps were heard approaching. On one

side lay her husband, bleeding to death; on the other, her lover in a deep swoon. The unhappy lady, racked by all the torments of hell, cried in self-accusation, 'I have killed him! I have killed him!'

'A dark—a fearful drama!' murmured the President. 'The only one who can bring some light into this chaos will not survive the coming night—his mouth is closed for ever.'

My heart sank within me. So this also must come upon her! What would happen now? From whence could the truth be obtained?

There was a little stir at the other end of the room. The fainting man made a scarcely perceptible movement; he opened

his eyes, and with a troubled look gazed round the apartment.

The Doctor immediately placed his arm under his head, and raised him a little, so that on his return to consciousness he might be able to breathe more freely. The Baroness gave utterance to a slight cry, then a sob was heard from behind her clasped hands.

The President gave me a sign, and went out. I followed him.

'There are too many people in the room,' he said softly. 'Will you go across to the Baron and watch over him? Pay great attention to every word—to every syllable—that he speaks. Everything is of the greatest importance. My duty is in here.'

As he left me I looked after him.

When he opened the door, I could see the stranger in his bed, sitting upright, with a rigid expression of countenance. The Baroness had seized one of his hands and bent her head over it. Dark, heavy masses of hair almost entirely concealed her face.

I shook my head anxiously. What did it all mean? That man—I recognised him now—I had seen the solitary wanderer several times before, always alone, always in unfrequented roads—a tall, distinguished-looking man—an invalid, pale and haggard. How came the Baroness to know this man? How could she lose her heart to this world-weary wanderer, when a thousand others had sighed at her feet in vain?

Women are incomprehensible creatures!

Is it possible that a lady of the highest virtue, who had led an irreproachable life for five-and-twenty years, should, in a few short weeks, dishonour her husband and even become his murderess? And for such a man as the one over there! In what a world do we live!

With a sad and sorrowful heart I entered the room where the dying husband lay. The police-doctor sat by his bed. He threw me an angry look. Without noticing it, I took a place on one side, so that I could observe the Baron.

He lay there pale and rigid, stretched at full length on his couch. So fixed were his features, that one could have imagined he was already dead. Nevertheless, it

seemed as if he had regained consciousness, for sometimes, when the doctor touched his body with the cold sponge, he opened his eyes, and looked slowly round the room with an inquiring and threatening gaze. The look only lasted each time for a few seconds, then the lids closed feebly, and the features resumed their former expression.

I sat there a long time without moving, buried in painful thought.

Suddenly the door opened, and the Baroness came in trembling. Poor lady—unhappy creature! how wild she looked—maddened with terror! What desolation of soul had that one hour worked in those lovely features!

She remained standing for a moment

near the door to recover breath, to collect her thoughts; she pressed her hand firmly upon her bosom, and raised her eyes on high, as if appealing to God for mercy for her guilt-laden soul. A stifled sob burst from her lips; a cold shudder ran through her frame. She seemed as if she would sink into the earth.

By a great effort, mastering her emotion, she came forward, trembling, and stood at her husband's bedside. The doctor rose sullenly. She sank into his seat, and seized the Baron's hand.

'Rudolph!' she murmured, with trembling lips. 'Oh, Rudolph!' in a tone that cut me to the heart.

Her husband slowly opened his eyes, gazed fixedly for a second on the unhappy

woman, then closed them again. His brow resumed its threatening expression—he hastily withdrew his hand from his wife's clasp, as if he recoiled from her touch.

Two large tears rolled slowly down the pale cheeks of the Baroness, and dropped upon her bosom. She sat there, the picture of misery—the handsome, proud woman, in the agony of remorse and sorrow.

I pitied her from my heart.

Her head sank upon her breast, and she closed her eyes. She remained a long time without making the slightest movement, and it was so still in the room that I could hear the beating of my own heart.

The doctor broke this painful silence. With the damp compress in his hand, he approached the couch.

'Pardon me, madame,' he said, rather less roughly than before.

He turned back the covering, and I rose to lead the Baroness away, for the sight of the wound might terrify her. She yielded in silence—I do not think she recognised me—she was too overwhelmed with grief.

As I was returning to my post, the President came and beckoned me out.

'The stranger is recovering!' he said. 'Oh, Bagdanoff, can this scene of misery be real! One sees many strange things in my profession, but this borders on unbelief. The Doctor will stay with him—no interrogation can be attempted as yet. The only one who could speak would be the Baroness. But I must confess to you, the present unhappy condition of that lady

inspires me with such pity, that it goes against my heart to pain her now. I will take the responsibility of the delay upon myself, but this must be on one condition, dear friend—you must promise me, in the interests of justice, to stay in the house to-night. Of course the Doctor will be with them—you have therefore only to be careful that everything remains unaltered —do you understand?'

'Certainly, I quite understand, and will do all you wish.'

'I know *that*, and thank you heartily,' said he. 'My presence would be painful to the Baroness, would agitate and terrify her, and that in any case would be prejudicial—above all, for the elucidation of the mystery. Promise me this one thing, that

you will conscientiously watch every word and every action that might be of any importance, and that you will send for me immediately in case any change should take place here. I will leave two of my men behind me; they will remain below with the landlord, and will be entirely at your orders.'

I faithfully promised everything.

The President had turned to go, when he suddenly came back and seized my arm.

'I shall be glad if we find that *she*, at least, had no actual share in that fearful deed,' he said, with deep emotion. 'I shall hasten at once to the Golden Rose, to take precautions that no one may learn what has happened, and to give the strictest orders to the editors of the various journals

to be silent. That scandal-mongering paper, the *Weekly Review*, must be muzzled—you understand?'

I pressed his hand.

'And now, good-night, Bagdanoff,' he said, while an angry glance flashed from his eyes; 'I am going to prepare a little surprise for some one.'

'What are you going to do?'

'To put the Hofmarschall under lock and key,' he whispered in my ear.

I looked at him with amazement.

He nodded his head emphatically, and pressed my hand in his.

'He is a reptile upon whose neck I will put my foot—but not a word: this is in the strictest confidence. And now, once more, good-night.'

The President gave me an assuring smile, and descended the steps.

The magistrate and the others followed, except the two men who were left on guard. Soon afterwards the police-doctor took his leave, with the spiteful remark :

'I am no longer wanted here, Herr Colleague.'

The other surgeon and I remained alone on the scene of the calamity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT OF DARKNESS.

'From short, as usual, and disturbed repose,
I wake; how happy they who wake no more!'

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT OF DARKNESS.

It was the most miserable night of my life. Two men, in mortal agony, placed under my care—the one perhaps the murderer of the other—each in separate rooms; and between them the woman, the cause of all this misery, wandering like a ghost from one to the other without peace or rest.

How many significant looks did we cast upon one another as the hours slowly

rolled by, and how longingly we wished that the day would come!

The Baron sank into a lethargic condition—a sleep as deep and sound as death. About four in the morning the sick stranger also slept. On a chair near him sat the unhappy lady watching his slumbers, until she also lost consciousness.

Merciful God! how she must love that strange man! Wretched, mistaken woman!

What a fearful condition was this for such a being as she, whose life, until now, had been a mirror of purity, upon whose character rested not the slightest stain, before whose countenance slander mutely bowed its head!

What a deep, bottomless abyss!

Yesterday she was fêted and courted—to-day she is an outcast. The iron hand of justice is stretched out towards her.

From the salon to the dungeon!

My heart bled. I could think of nothing else but that.

* * * * *

When she awoke, as the first faint glimmer from the east heralded the approach of another day, the Baroness recognised me. She pressed her hand upon her eyes and began to weep bitterly. In the cold grey twilight the scene looked more awful than ever. She raised her eyes for one second to mine, and in her look I read her thoughts: 'Yesterday, at this hour, I was an enviable woman—to-

day I wake from a short, terrifying slumber, and find myself the most miserable.'

I stepped up to her.

'Dear lady,' I said compassionately, 'tell me, what can I do for you?'

For a short time she stood there, sobs choking her utterance; then she cried, with an accent of heart-rending grief:

'Ah! I have killed *him*, Bagdanoff, as well as this one,' pointing to the pale dark-haired man lying on the bed. In this simple movement there was something more touching even than in the tone of her voice. 'I am an unhappy creature,' she sobbed.

'Mélanie!'

The stranger's voice suddenly sounded

from behind the curtains; its tone was faint, but impressive.

'Mélanie!'

The sick man called again, and raised himself a little.

The Baroness turned to him—her eyes gleamed feverishly.

'Constantine! Beloved Constantine!' she sobbed, raising her arms passionately, and sank on her knees by his couch—her frame quivered with emotion.

The invalid placed his thin long hand soothingly upon her head, and murmured soft words of comfort.

This sight quite overcame me, and set my inmost soul in uproar. Revulsion and compassion struggled together for the mastery. Over there, only a few steps

away, lay the dying husband; and here—here knelt the wife by the couch of her lover! What an abyss is a woman's soul!

The greatest nobility, and the deepest degradation, how close do they lie to one another!

Unhappy creature! she appeared even to be praying—her eyes were raised on high, her hands clasped, her lips moving.

And the hand of that man—perhaps the same hand that had directed the instrument of murder to her husband's heart—still rested upon her head.

I rose hastily. Aversion—detestation seized me. I rushed out. 'Give me air,' I cried, and put both hands to my head.

But enough, enough of this heart-rending scene.

In the early morning came the servant of the Princess, desiring urgently to see me; he brought a note from his mistress, written by her own hand, which was most unusual for her. It ran thus:

'What a terrible event, my friend! Come to me at once—I must speak to you immediately.

'Your very affectionate

'O. A.

So the Princess had already heard the news of the terrible event that had happened. Perhaps the whole town knew it by this time, in spite of all the precautions of the President. Reports penetrate even

through door-chinks and key-holes. Good heavens! what a story must be circulating all over W——!

I hastily wrote a few lines on the Princess's note, to the effect that I would come as soon as possible, and gave it to the servant.

Scarcely had he gone when the chief of the police appeared.

'Well, what has happened here? How has the night passed?' he asked, drawing me aside, and looking searchingly in my face.

I gave him a detailed report of everything, especially with regard to the behaviour of the Baroness. I was overstrained with all that I had gone through; the painful scene of misery had told on my nerves and quite exhausted me. Besides,

I was angry and indignant, as well as grieved, at what I had just witnessed. I took all imaginable pains to express no harsh opinion. I endeavoured to speak quite impartially, yet the President's eyes gradually became fixed upon me with a peculiar expression; the longer I spoke, the more anxious was his countenance. I told him how the Baroness had cried out, 'I have killed *him*, as well as this one!' and this information appeared particularly to strike him. He put his hand on his chin, and reflected for some time.

'The affair becomes more complicated, Bagdanoff,' he said, after some time; 'I cannot understand it; help me, I pray you, to arrive at some conclusion.'

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'We shall have to commence the formal examination to-day,' he continued, after a long pause. Then he added, shrugging his shoulders: 'This sad story will cause the most painful excitement. His Highness will be almost beside himself—the Maszmanns were amongst the most intimate visitors of the Court circle.'

'Of course,' I answered; 'and then the poor child Nina—the thought of the little one lies heavily on my heart. Perhaps, in the meantime, she might be taken to the Princess. Her good heart——'

'That is an excellent idea!' hastily interrupted the President. 'Will you add to your other kindnesses, dear Bagdanoff, by fetching the little creature yourself? Tell her some plausible story—that her

parents have been suddenly called away, and will return in a few days—or something similar—you will easily manage it. But, above all things, take care that the child does not come in contact with other people, nor hear anything that might enter like poisoned venom into her soul. You would not believe how far malice will go; I can give you a proof of it. I can tell you a very pretty tale when you come back.'

He urged me to hasten.

I myself experienced the liveliest longing to go out into the fresh air, to be able to take breath, and collect my thoughts. Seizing my hat, I hurried down the stairs, and had already reached the lower flight, when the President bent over the banisters and called to me.

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I shook my head mournfully.

I began reflecting how I could best manage it—to keep the fate of her parents concealed from her, and to guard her from any harsh touch.

I went on, my hands buried deep in my pockets, without looking to the right or left. I was just crossing the principal street, when I heard my name called behind me.

'Herr Bagdanoff! Herr Bagdanoff!'

I looked round and saw a man enveloped in furs hastening after me; he was a retired bookseller, who passed his time in making acquaintances and picking up gossip. I scarcely knew the man, and did not look very pleasantly at him.

'What do you want?' I said shortly; 'I am in a hurry.'

'Good heavens!' he cried breathlessly, 'have you heard the terrible news? Only fancy, the Baroness Maszmann — that beautiful lady so universally adored—that she, yesterday evening, in conjunction with her lover, should have murdered her husband!'

Angry and terrified, I hastened on to avoid hearing more. So the sparrows upon the housetops have proclaimed it already! I raised my fist and shook it furiously. It is true, they are vermin; they feed on the carcases of others. And yet, as the poet says:

'Und möcht' ich sie zusammenschmeizen
Könnt' ich sie doch nicht Lügner heiszen!'

During my short walk to the Golden

Rose, I met about a dozen of these professional idlers, in whom W—— is so rich ; all had heard it already, and all told it me in different styles. Some spoke with honest regret ; others, who take pleasure in the unhappiness of their fellow-creatures, and have the gratification of feeling themselves better men when they see others fall, seemed full of malicious joy.

It was like running the gauntlet.

Half an hour later I had safely conveyed the little one and her governess to the Princess's house, in a close carriage. I told the child that her parents had gone to Heidelberg for two or three days, and would soon be back ; she would, meanwhile, stay with the Princess. She believed my words with childlike confidence. I had

already, by a short note, made my motherly friend acquainted with what had happened, and begged her protection for Nina. I was not mistaken in her ; she was ready to welcome her a thousand times, and to offer her a place of refuge.

All was well managed. Fräulein von Weber was soon upstairs with the child, and I hastened to the Princess, for I knew how anxiously she awaited me.

Tatiana, her Russian waiting-maid, stood at the door with the handle in her hand.

'Her Highness is already up,' she whispered in my ear as an astonishing piece of news ; 'she is waiting for you, and has rung the bell two or three times.'

She drew back the curtain, and I found myself in the well-known sanctum.

It was true—that unheard-of thing had taken place—as early as nine o'clock the Princess had left her bed. A woollen handkerchief was twisted over her night-cap, and hung down upon her shoulders; her pale, expressive features were agitated with surprise and emotion; she was rubbing her thin white hands nervously together.

She rose hastily from her sofa when she perceived me.

'So, Nicolas Seminitsch Bagdanoff, you are come at last,' she said reproachfully, as she stepped towards me.

I kissed her hand.

'Yes, I am come, your Highness,' I answered, with a deep sigh. Then our eyes met. She was as sad, as deeply ap-

prehensive as myself, and in her eyes lay the same question: Can it be possible?

'Can it be possible, tell me?' she said softly, holding my hand firmly in hers, with dilated pupils fixed upon me.

'Speak, Nicolas—tell me—what has happened? The Baroness! Mélanie! I cannot believe it, even though the fearful thing assumes the highest probability. No, I have lived too long in the world to be mistaken in a face. No, Mélanie is not guilty—I would lay my head upon the block for her. And yet—it is a sad, sad business!'

The Princess was so agitated that, without knowing it, and quite contrary to her usual custom, she spoke these last words to me in Russian. She had lived so long

abroad that she had almost forgotten how to use her mother tongue. But in moments of great excitement one's native language comes back again spontaneously.

She gazed at me inquiringly with her large expressive eyes, her lips trembled; she seemed quite old and broken down, like the grandmother in the old German legend.

How good and noble she looked, the dear old lady! She was really more handsome and venerable in her quaint costume this morning than when driving in full state to court; so much had compassion and sympathy ennobled and beautified her.

I led her to a seat. What could I say to her? Indeed, I knew nothing—nothing

certain. My head was a chaos, my heart a desert. Wretched feelings of doubt, of aversion, filled my soul. Yesterday evening I should have thought and spoken just as the Princess had done. I would have gone through fire and water for that unhappy woman, but to-day——'

'I pray your Highness be seated—calm yourself, Olga Petrowna!' I implored, in some embarrassment.

'And why did you not send me a line yesterday evening? I would have gone to her assistance, dear, unhappy creature! I learnt it only this morning. Terror struck me, I trembled in all my limbs. But, I pray you, tell me something, Nicolas.'

She buried herself in the cushions as if

shivering with cold, and I began my story. I related to her simply, in order, what I had seen and experienced.

The Princess sat there and listened to me. The dancing flame on the hearth lighted up her anxious, wrinkled face, giving it a strange appearance in the grey twilight of the winter morning, which struggled feebly into the room through the thick curtains. Her head sank lower and lower, her hands were pressed close together, and her whole frame seemed to shrink with fear.

Now and then an exclamation of terror and compassion escaped her thin, compressed lips, and her eyes, unnaturally large, were fixed upon my mouth, as if she would anticipate my words.

When I mentioned the scene with the Hofmarschall, she became quite excited.

'Ah, the *canaille!*' she murmured, with uncontrolled scorn, 'may Heaven strike him!'

To the proceedings of the President she nodded approbation, and muttered now and then:

'Good character—kind-hearted man!'

She accompanied all my narrative with expressive words and gestures.

While I was telling my tale, my looks involuntarily wandered round the large room; it had a strange look. In the background stood the high bed, the contour of which indicated that the Princess had not long left it; near it was her watch and the night-light still burning. Fanchon and Boabdil, the two dogs of the Princess, lay

on some parts of their mistress's attire, which were on the carpet, their noses between their paws. They were accustomed, like their mistress, to sleep until five o'clock, so that at this early hour in the morning it was still the depth of the night to them. Close by the fireside, upon a chair, was a large black-bound book with gold leaves. I was amazed—the Princess, that free-thinker! Yes, without doubt, it was a Prayer-book, I saw the slope of the gold cross upon its cover. The Princess had been praying.

Yes, be we ever such sceptics, still, somewhere, under our worldly trifles, hidden in a corner, lies the good old book of our childhood; and when the soul is overwhelmed with anguish, then we fetch

it forth and seek confidence and strength from its simple words.

To each one of us there come hours in life when all philosophy fails; when the best system breaks down—is blown away like chaff; when the hands are folded almost involuntarily in prayer; when the eyes are raised on high, and the heart flies to its God.

And you also, child of the world, behind that mask, at the bottom of your noble human heart, the fountain of religion is springing still. How very much must the Princess have taken to heart the unhappiness of the Baroness!

As I spoke of the sight in the room, and of that stranger, she looked up and fixed her eyes upon me.

'Good heavens!' she murmured, and raised herself from her stooping posture. 'What was he like, Nicolas?' she asked hastily. 'And she—Mélanie—is it possible? —bending over that man, while her husband lay bleeding upon the floor! Good God!'

I continued my story, and she sank back, looking older and more broken down than before. I only related the bare facts, and refrained from giving any opinion; I was anxious to know what inference the Princess would draw from them.

She let me speak quietly to the end, without interrupting me, and when I had finished, remained for a short time in deep reflection.

At last something glittered in her eyes —Olga Petrowna was weeping, the tears

rolled down her furrowed cheeks. I turned away, I could not look at her, for I had never seen her weep.

'Nicolas,' she began, after some moments of profound silence, 'this is a fearful tale. The finger of God is here. Mélanie is indeed in a desperate position. Whatever may happen—however this mystery may be solved—she is deeply to be pitied! Many will condemn her—will consider her guilty. Ah, who is without guilt, Nicolas? I do not judge her—I do not believe that this lovely woman can be an outcast—a murderess! No murderess ever looked like that! If all turn against her, I will stand by her. In my heart a voice speaks loudly: "She is innocent of such a crime!" Do you not know that a woman, even

the best, can err? When she feels the intoxication of passion; when love, like a whirlwind, sweeps over her, the firmest principles are sometimes uprooted!—ah, I have seen that, during the seventy years I have now lived in this world.'

What a wonder it was, to hear the Princess confess her age!

'Yes—all of us err, even the best, but they err nobly. They are more to be pitied than condemned! Yes—whatever miserable knaves may say — woman's honour, woman's virtue, still holds sway in this world—yes, indeed. Listen to me, Nicolas. Such eyes as hers cannot lie; such a voice cannot be false. She bears God's seal, the seal of purity, on her brow. Some terrible mystery is concealed here—some

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of the Princess had also inspired me. But afterwards, when I stood at the window, waiting, gazing out into the grey morning, the scenes of the night came back to me with redoubled force; doubt and disquietude pressed heavily upon my soul.

A closed carriage quickly brought us to the house. The President of police came to the gate himself to speak to the Princess, but he had nothing consoling to communicate; indeed, he would not permit her to see the Baroness, as she was then under examination. So, our mission of mercy unfulfilled, we were obliged to return.

The Princess spoke not a word on our way back, but sat with firmly-closed lips, with the hood of her sable cloak drawn over her face.

As we alighted from the carriage, we perceived another standing before her hotel.

She looked up. 'Is that the doctor, dear Ellen?' she asked.

It was not the doctor.

Above, on the first floor, we found the Countess Draunfels and the Baroness Zumberg, engaged in a violent altercation with Tatiana, who was preventing their entrance.

'But I tell you, you foolish girl, that I must absolutely speak with her Highness!' cried the Countess, violently, attempting to push the maid aside just as we came up.

'Here I am, what do you want with me?' asked the Princess in a distinct voice, with a queenly air.

The two ladies started in terror, and began to apologise.

'Oh, no excuses, ladies,' she answered condescendingly; 'as you say that you must speak to me, I pray you enter.'

At a gesture from the Princess they sat down. We were in the large salon, which had not yet been heated.

Both ladies were still a little overawed by the grand air of the Princess, but the desire to impart their news was considerably stronger than their timidity.

Fräulein Zumberg had scarcely seated herself upon the sofa, when she burst forth:

'Oh, heavens! Your Highness! Can it be true? You know it already, you have heard this dreadful news! Good heavens! what a scandal! How it must have over-

whelmed you! Yes—I have long seen it coming.'

She spoke with great energy, in the way peculiar to old maids and gossips.

'Yes, indeed—how it must have overwhelmed you, dear Princess!' here interrupted the Countess, turning up the whites of her eyes hypocritically. 'We came here immediately—we wished to inquire how your Highness bore this terrible blow—your precious health——'

A commanding gesture from the Princess suddenly shut both their mouths, though afterwards they literally remained open.

The Princess rose with the dignity of a queen.

'Ladies,' she said coldly, 'you follow a miserable profession. A grave-digger's

occupation is a respectable one in comparison with yours; *he* buries the dead and plants flowers on their graves—*you*, on the contrary—— But enough, I had almost forgotten myself. Adieu, ladies! Nicolas, your arm.'

We heard some bustle outside, and five minutes later the roll of a departing carriage. Those two charitable Samaritans were continuing their rounds through the town.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOFMARSCHALL VON BÜCKING.

'My plots thrive not; my engines all deceive me,
And in the very point of their discharge
Recoil with danger to myself.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOFMARSCHALL VON BÜCKING.

HALF an hour later I found myself once more in the Garden Road.

As I drew near the place, the whole street seemed alive; at every step I was stopped and questioned.

'You were always a friend of the Baron's,' or, 'Have you heard the dreadful news?' or, 'Ah! one cannot trust those fair faces.' So they spoke, trying to detain me.

What abominable pleasure some people

take in scandal! How eagerly will they hasten to the scene of misfortune, and revel in the details, especially if noble ladies are concerned. Are there, then, so many evil hearts in the world?

Before the house in which the fearful event had taken place, groups of people were assembled, conversing in agitated, awestruck whispers. Every time the door opened, all their looks were eagerly directed towards it, and every neck was stretched out. They were not the rabble alone who stood here, and who were restrained only by the presence of two policemen from taking the house by storm; no—there were many well-dressed people, men and women, standing for hours up to their ankles in snow, watching for the smallest

piece of news. Many of them, presuming upon their position in society, attempted by threats or persuasions to obtain an entrance. But the policemen had received the strictest orders to keep every one out, whoever they might be.

There arose much murmuring and discontent among the crowd when they saw me permitted to pass.

'All have an equal right here, Herr Commissary! Why do you allow that gentleman to enter, and keep me out? Do you not know who I am?' exclaimed an angry voice.

'Bagdanoff! Herr Bagdanoff!' I heard another calling behind me, 'one moment!'

I took no notice, but entered the house.

In a room especially appropriated to him, the President of police received me.

'I am glad that you have come,' he said; 'you must relieve me here for an hour. The examination is just over, and I must hasten to the Prince, to obtain his Highness's commands regarding our friend von Bücking. Sit down.'

'And how is it here now?' I asked anxiously.

'There is nothing consoling to report,' he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

We sat silently for a moment, then he began again.

'I was going to tell you something about this same brave Hofmarschall. Listen, dear friend.

'The scoundrel has for some time past

owed me a score, for, besides his ordinary mischief-making, he has meddled with other things which have brought him into the power of the law. You know the police have sharp eyes; they can see through wood and stone. He has for some time carried on a lucrative trade in special things—Hungarian wine, spice, etc.'

'How?' I asked in astonishment.

'Ah, you think that extraordinary, do you? And yet it is exactly as I have said.'

Until now I had listened to him somewhat absently, for my thoughts were with the unhappy creatures upstairs. I was listening for the slightest noise, only hearing his words with half an ear; but now I began to pay more attention. The

Hofmarschall a dealer in foreign goods! How was that possible?

'Listen,' continued the President, with a serious air; 'we have, as you know, a half-Austrian, half-Bavarian garrison in the neighbourhood of B——; it is an allied fortress, and, according to ancient usage, the soldiers receive their provisions and other necessaries free of duty.

'Bücking had once been in the Austrian service, and came here, a poor devil, to make his fortune at our court. You have already heard how very much our Prince Paul inclines to Austria; he smiles if he only hears the Styrian language; he says it reminds him of the happy days of his youth, and of everything charming. It is even whispered that his first boyish love

was given to a Styrian maiden. In short, Bücking established himself at court; and he succeeded the more easily, because the cunning fellow came here in company with a sister, a gay and not very scrupulous lady, who spoke Styrian to perfection—the present Countess W ——.'

I gave utterance to an involuntary exclamation. I had already heard of this lady. She was now the extremely pious wife of an exceedingly bigoted nobleman. She had once spent a winter in St. Petersburg. In a very charitable judgment she might be a convert, but at that time she was the gayest of the gay, and very strange things were related of her.

The President of police looked attentively at me for a second, with a gleam

of intelligence in his eye, then he continued:

'Well, Bagdanoff, this fellow was made gentleman of the bed-chamber, with a salary of six hundred gulden; he had previously been employed in our bureau, where we had learnt to know him.

'The Bückings are without a kreuzer of fortune, as bare as the palm of my hand, and six hundred gulden is a poor income for a young man who has many wants, and is, besides, over head and ears in debt.

'Our intelligent gentleman hit upon a very brilliant idea to assist his embarrassed circumstances. He had still some connection with his Austrian comrades in B——, and this he made use of in a very ingenious way. Upon the pretext of

becoming better acquainted with the management of the official service, he went for several months to Unkstein, where the ducal estates are situated. The pretty sister at the same time paid a visit to an old schoolfellow, the wife of one of the captains belonging to the border regiment. As might be expected, his sister being so near, Herr Bücking rode daily from Unkstein to B—— to see her. A short time afterwards, the commander of the regiment noticed that the consumption of spice in the household of some of his officers had increased enormously. At last, the colonel sent for one of the officers, and questioned him on the subject.

'"How is it, captain, that you have four

hundredweight and a half of spice this month?" he inquired sternly.

'"Your pardon, colonel, I wanted it."

'"But I really cannot understand——"

'"Your pardon, colonel, my wife and I eat spice at all our meals."

'The colonel looked very serious, and enjoined the captain, for his own interests, to lessen his consumption of spice for the future, or he should be compelled to transfer him to some garrison in the interior.

'This was stopped for the present, but it did not much improve matters, for now the trade commenced with Hungarian wines, sugar, and other taxed articles. This continued for several years, and when the authorities at last succeeded in putting

down this contraband trade, it was found that Bücking had managed so craftily that nothing could be proved against him. I alone possessed sufficient evidence to convict him, but till now have made no use of it, because the fellow was attached to the court, and his sister had married into one of the best families in the land—it was not my business to make a scandal! It is a good thing, also, with such people as Bücking, to keep something back which may serve as a check.

'I therefore kept the line in my hand, so as to be able to draw the noose round the scoundrel's neck, in case, at any time, he should go too far. Yesterday I drew it tight, and he now sits behind iron bars, with plenty of time to meditate on his past

life. You should have seen what a face he made, when my men fetched him out from his game of cards: "Herr Hofmarschall von Bücking, I arrest you for peculation and fraud!"

'It was as if a spark had fallen into a powder magazine; he stormed and raved —he would go to the Prince—he would protest his innocence, and call all the world to witness. But it was all of no use, we were cruel enough not to believe him; he was led away to prison, and there safely guarded.

'But I must hasten away to see the Prince; he will be very much astonished at what I have to tell him.'

He went out, and left me alone; I watched him down the street, and saw

how he was assailed on all sides by questions. With a stern gesture he shook off the troublesome idlers, and jumped into a carriage waiting close by, which immediately drove off.

It began to snow, the crowd outside dispersed a little.

I sat alone for a quarter of an hour in the little room, looking gloomily out into the whirlwind of falling flakes; then my presence was requested by the magistrate, that he might examine me.

The Baron von Maszmann still lay in the same condition, hovering between life and death. The American could not be interrogated, the physician having strictly forbidden it. The Baroness, overcome by bodily suffering and distress of mind, had

fallen into a deep swoon. The magistrate had asked her if she confessed that she was the murderer of her husband.

Pale as death, she had uttered a scarcely audible 'Yes.'

'Then it was you, yourself, who directed the weapon upon him?'

The unhappy lady had drawn herself up, wavered for a moment, then, with a fearful cry, had fallen like a broken reed.

So the mystery still remained unsolved. The Köhlers, the servant-maid and myself, could throw but little light upon it.

The woman of the house deposed, that towards evening the bell was violently pulled, and when she opened the door, a tall man, wrapped in furs, stood before her.

'I am the Baron von Maszmann: I am come to fetch my wife,' he said, and with a hasty salute passed up the stairs. She gazed after him in some surprise, thinking to herself, that must surely be the husband of the lady who comes here to wait on the sick gentleman.

Standing below, she heard the door open and shut, and the report of the pistol immediately followed.

The magistrate could elicit nothing further, and was obliged to leave. The house was strictly watched. The Doctor and I alone remained on the upper floor, in charge of those three unhappy creatures under the penalty of the law or of death.

No one besides ourselves was admitted.

Madame Köhler undertook the care of the Baroness.

Such was the state of affairs, and thus they remained for several days. Justice, as well as curiosity, was obliged to wait.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWSPAPER SCANDAL.

'Tis pleasant, too, to see one's words in print ;
A book's a book, although there's nothing in't.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWSPAPER SCANDAL.

In the afternoon of that day the President returned; with a somewhat excited air he entered the little room in which I had installed myself. He looked upon me with a self-satisfied smile, for which I should hardly have given him credit, as he was usually a grave and kindly man.

'Heaven and earth! I have plunged into a wasp's nest!' he exclaimed.

I looked at him, without comprehending.

'Let me sit down, and light a cigar, Bagdanoff, for I have been on my legs since yesterday morning; and then I will tell you the whole story.'

He lighted his cigar, while I sat as if upon hot coals; then he continued:

'You know that yesterday evening I gave strict orders to the editors of our newspapers to make no mention in their morning's issue of the drama that had taken place in this house, especially as the official investigation had not yet been completed.

'I did this chiefly out of regard to the court, to whom it must be in the highest degree painful to see discussed in the papers a scandal, with such a terrible issue, concerning persons of their own immediate

circle. I thought also of the unhappy creatures here, and was convinced that, in time, the mystery might be elucidated. I had no doubt that my commands would be obeyed, especially as I have always behaved with great courtesy towards the editors. Well, this morning, as I was driving to the Palace, I found that I had been deceived. We have here a little insignificant journal called the *Mittwoch Magasin*, conducted by an obscure individual without culture, and of doubtful morals. How on earth people can read his twaddle I cannot imagine!

'Monsieur Fröhlich, as the editor calls himself, was for some time croupier' at Homburg, and carried on a private trade in jewellery and ornaments, which embar-

rassed gamblers, especially female ones, brought to him for sale. He lost this post and came to W——, where he set up this newspaper. He lives by scandal; he is an uneducated fellow, and cannot write an article, but frequents wine-shops and beer-houses to pick up little bits of gossip. He has also agents of the lowest kind, and there are others who endeavour, through his journal, to wound their neighbours with secret arrows.

'I have long wished to suppress this paper, but in vain, for these little courts are centres of trifling and chattering, especially this one of W——.

'But, strange to say, this review of his has often contained articles written by a very clever pen, evidently emanating

from some one far above the editor in social position. These articles have excited much attention, even in the highest circles; we have often tried to discover the author, but Herr Fröhlich has never betrayed him.

'This morning a copy of the paper was handed to me fresh from the press, in which the sad event here was detailed in full, with comments of the most abominable character. I immediately had the printing-office closed, the editor arrested, and his house searched. I myself undertook the examination; the result was extraordinary. At first I had to fight against stubborn denial, with all kinds of evasion and subterfuge. But suddenly the fellow changed his tone. He became as white as a sheet

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when one of my officers, a very clever man, brought in a large packet of papers and letters which he had found in a secret drawer. Herr Fröhlich was now as cringing and servile as he had before been insolent; he found himself in deep water, and in his anxiety was willing to confess everything.

'I broke open the packet — good heavens! what strange things came to light. Upon my word of honour I was astounded. I found there letters, articles, drafts from people of all ranks and classes — from people who would think themselves insulted if you looked them in the face and said: "Do you write for the *Mittwoch Magasin?*" What will not men do when they are impelled by malice, by revenge,

by love of gossip, even by the silly desire to see their tales in print, if it can only be done in secret, without exposure. This writing anonymous letters, this fighting with the pen instead of the sword, what a cancer it is!

'Well, dear Bagdanoff, I brought a whole collection to light. I shall be able to trace most of the authors, and I will gibbet them without mercy'

'Certainly,' said I, 'you will only treat them as they deserve. Such persons belong to the pillory. But what a want of principle in the editor! What a betrayal of his fellow-workers! Why had he not burnt the manuscripts? He must have assured the writers that they should be destroyed.'

'Ah, my friend,' said the President, 'he kept them as an effective weapon, that he might use them for his own purposes. If only our friend Bücking could have imagined what would happen! Only think, I found about a dozen letters and articles in his well-known hand, which gave me the most complete evidence that all these piquant tales of scandal, which have been circulating so freely and disturbing the peace of our town for so long, emanated chiefly from him.

'With what a clever pen the fellow wrote, dipped in gall and venom! Now with a harmless word, now with a simple sentence, he knew how to inflict mortal wounds. If he only could have imagined that these arrows would be turned against

himself, he would rather have cut off his hand than have discharged them. Even the most crafty men sometimes outwit themselves.

'What a splendid weapon he has now placed in my hands to effect his own ruin with the Prince!

'Some time ago there appeared in this very journal a little harmless tale written in the country dialect. It seemed very innocent, and yet it created the greatest uproar throughout the whole land, and so irritated the Prince himself that he caused the most searching inquiries to be made for the author. It was attributed then to a woman, on account of several intimations and insinuations. To-day I learn that this

scandalous tale came from the pen of our good Bücking.'

'It is not possible!' I cried.

'You are right,' said he, 'it is hardly credible, but it is none the less true. This proceeding of the Hofmarschall was as unwise as it was ungrateful, for the Prince drew him out of obscurity, and can soon send him back into it again. He is now a wealthy man, and his sister is Countess W—— ; but he has ruined himself by the mean desire of gratifying his own malice and spreading his secret venom.

'Besides these letters of the Hofmarschall, I found several other very interesting documents, grammatical and ungrammatical—letters from ladies in all ranks of

society, true masterpieces of malice. Among them were some little notes from the ladies Draunfels and Zumberg!'

'Oh! that is grand.'

'Just so; and very interesting little documents they are. I hastened at once to the Palace with my prize. I will not deny to you, dear Bagdanoff, that I was received a little ungraciously. This unhappy event, and the arrest of the Hofmarschall, had very much excited the Prince, but I came away in triumph. The tables were turned when I drew my papers from my pocket and accompanied them with a full explanation. His Highness was astounded. I never saw him so angry.

'The result is that the scoundrel will

undergo the penalty of the law without mercy. He is deprived of all his offices and dignities, and loses his pension besides. Monsieur Fröhlich also receives his well-deserved punishment; his newspaper is suppressed, and he is exiled from the land.

An hour ago, by the order of the Lord Steward, the two ladies, whose names you know, were forbidden to appear at court.

'At first his Highness insisted that all these pamphlets and anonymous letters should be published, with the names of the authors attached. It was with the greatest difficulty I induced him to abandon this idea, and he only yielded when I pointed

out to him what a train of evil, duels, law-suits, might possibly arise.

'So, my friend, this is the great news I bring you, a whole sackful. I am glad to have unmasked so much wickedness; my heart swells with loathing and aversion when I think of it. How bad the world is!'

'It is everywhere the same,' I answered sadly, 'the world and mankind. But believe me, dear friend, it is not worse here in W—— than elsewhere. On the contrary, I have found that in this place a trait of openness, of amiability, runs through all classes of the people, which charms the stranger, and makes him feel that he will soon be at home here.'

We were interrupted. The Doctor

wished to speak to the President. The Baron's state was so bad that one might expect his death at any moment.

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CHAPTER X.

SUSPENSE.

'Closing in deadliest night and gloom
Long hours of aching, dumb suspense.'

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SUSPENSE.

WHILE I was thus shut up as a captive in the little house, going from one room to the other in care and anxiety, while, heavy as lead, the hours rolled by in monotonous succession, outside in the town the waves of curiosity and excitement rose to a great height.

Society was stirred to its very depths—the earth seemed to tremble—the waters surged and foamed—surprise followed sur-

prise! The murder in the Garden Road, the arrest of the Hofmarschall, which seemed connected with it, and about which extraordinary tales were told; then, upon this, the other arrest, the house-searchings, the suspension of the newspaper, the banishment of the two courtiers; these events, mutiplied a thousandfold by confused and exaggerated reports, made a chaos in the town of W——. On all sides were to be seen countenances scowling with malice or pallid with fear.

Something of this excitement penetrated even to my quiet room.

The President came now and then to keep me company for an hour, and make me *au courant* with the State news. The Princess also wrote to me daily one or two

of her original notes, which I answered as often, but could not impart to her any fresh information, or anything which might tranquillise her feelings.

Doctor Wilhelmi told me that it was a wonder the Baron lived at all, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a wound of that sort proved absolutely fatal. He also shook his head very anxiously with regard to the mysterious stranger and the condition of the Baroness. His face became daily more foreboding of evil.

He said that the whole nervous system of the American was totally upset, either from excess or from severe mental suffering, or perhaps from both combined. The spring of his existence seemed to be de-

cayed, and he feared for his life almost as much as for that of the Baron.

And the Baroness? Like a tortured spirit she glided from one sick-room to the other. Silent, almost distracted, she would sit with clasped hands beside her husband's couch, gaze despairingly at his stony features, and listen tearlessly to the slight noise of his breathing. Then suddenly a restless change would come over her. Directing her gaze anxiously towards the door, she would listen like a mother who hears her child cry; then rising, with a slight moan, she would hasten from her husband's dying bed straight to that pale stranger, who lay close by in a state of unconsciousness.

She would throw herself upon him with

passionate ardour, hold him fast in a close embrace, call him by his name, implore him not to die for her sake, and then sink at last on her knees by his bedside, there to remain hour after hour, murmuring fervent prayers.

It was as terrible as it was mysterious.

In spite of the most careful inquiry, not the least evidence resulted which could aid in a solution of the riddle.

I myself, as well as the President and the Doctor, racked our brains in vain to discover any clue. We searched the whole house and made every investigation, nowhere could we find any evidence which might guide us to a right conclusion. The main facts seemed clear; that the Baron had found his wife by the couch of that

sick man; that, after a moment's struggle with himself, he had turned the pistol against his own heart, and fired. The impression on the glove was still unaccountable.

The frenzied cry of the Baroness, 'I have killed him! I have killed him!' might mean that she herself had fired the shot and killed her husband; or it might equally mean that she was only the moral cause of this murder, or suicide. It was indeed inconceivable that a delicately-nurtured woman should in a moment seize a pistol from her husband's hand and become his murderess.

So passed day after day in fruitless anxiety and uncertainty.

Outside, matters progressed with more

rapid steps. The Hofmarschall was convicted. In spite of his plausibility, in spite of open and hidden threats of being able to compromise persons in the highest society, in spite of denials and entreaties, he received his sentence. He was deprived of his offices, fined a large sum of money, and sent for three years to the State prison of Limburg. The editor got off with six months' imprisonment and exile.

Countess Draunfels and Baroness Zumberg left W—— under cover of the night. Later on they revenged themselves, in their own way, by publishing a little book at Vienna, full of gossip and slander, and bearing the significant title: 'Prince Zero and his Court; or, Highly interesting Revelations from the Great World.'

Those who bought the book, deluded by its title, might as well have thrown their money in the dirt. It contained nothing but dull falsehood and weary gossip—a true woman's revenge.

The Prince was magnanimous enough to continue the pension of two hundred gulden to Baroness Zumberg, which he still paid her.

END OF VOL. I.

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